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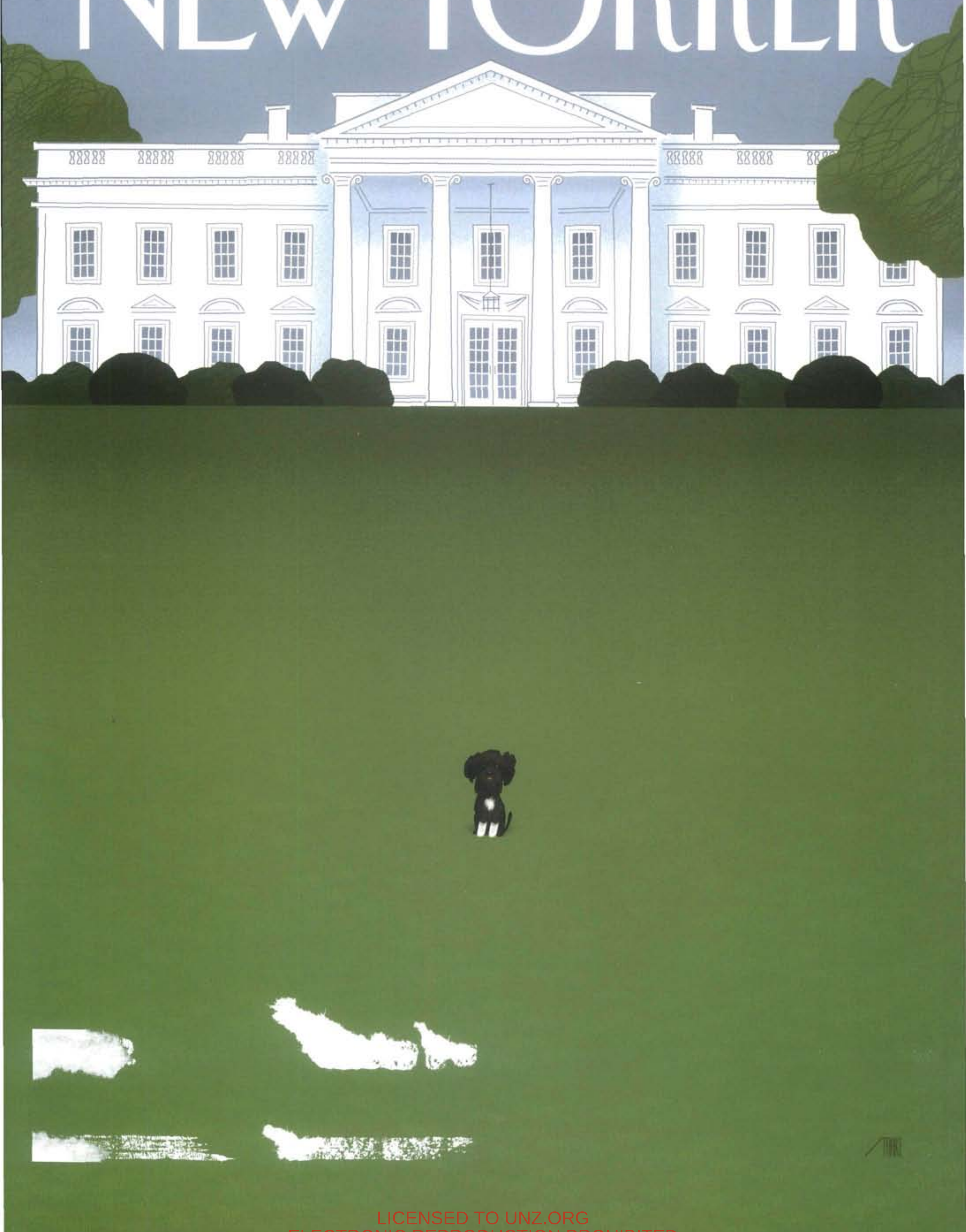
# THE NEW YORKER



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and all I got was a lousy T-shirt
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and all I got was this shirt
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Mitch Epstein (Photograph, p. 44) was awarded a Berlin Prize in the visual arts in 2008. His next book of photographs, "American Power," is due out in the fall.

Franz Wright (Poem, p. 52) won a Pulitzer Prize for his collection of poems "Walking to Martha's Vineyard." His new collection, "Wheeling Motel," will be published in September.

Guillermo Martínez (Fiction, p. 58) is the author of two books of short stories, several books of essays, and four novels, including "The Oxford Murders" and "The Book of Murder." He lives in Buenos Aires.

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Jill Lepore (A Critic at Large, p. 65) is a professor of history at Harvard and the chair of the History and Literature Program. "Blindspot," her novel with Jane Kamensky, came out in December.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 74) is the author of "Snark," which was published in January.

**THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM**

Ask the Author: *Margaret Talbot* takes readers' questions about neuroenhancers. / Audio: The Political Scene, a roundtable with *Dorothy Wickenden* and *Ryan Lizza; Elif Batuman* on Russian bells. / Video: *John Lahr* talks to André Bishop. / The Book Club discusses Orwell's "Down and Out in Paris and London." / Blogs: *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Jill Lepore* on Poe's puzzles, *Richard Brody* on movies, plus posts by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, Steve Coll, Sasha Frere-Jones*, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

# THE MAIL

## FEELING CHEATED

Nicholas Lemann urges Washington's policymakers not to succumb to the public's anger at bankers, and to "try to persuade the country that pure rage is not something to be honored and respected at this dangerous moment" (The Talk of the Town, April 6th). For fifteen years, I have diligently saved for retirement, heeding financial advisers, diversifying investments, and forgoing many extravagances in order to prepare for a comfortable (and possibly early) retirement. What do I have to show for acting responsibly? A fifty-per-cent decline in the value of my portfolio in the past year. Meanwhile, the creators of the risky investments and the clueless C.E.O.s who bought them get to keep their bloated paychecks and bonuses, thanks to federal bailouts now totalling trillions of dollars, seemingly without a hint of shame. In effect, members of the public are paying the salaries of people who make more money in a year than we will probably make in a lifetime. It seems that a little rage is in order just now. Perhaps those who created this mess should be banished from the financial industry, not paid handsomely to clean it up.

*Aaron Fischbach*
*Washington, D.C.*

## FINANCIAL COLLAPSE

Ron Chernow's article on Ponzi schemes effectively reviews the history of a bizarre economic phenomenon ("Madoff and His Models," March 23rd). There's another model as well, on a national level: Albania's experience with financial pyramids in the mid-nineteen-nineties, after the introduction of a market economy. As many as two-thirds of the Albanian population invested in schemes, closely tied to the government, with little or no real prospect for long-term payouts. At their peak, the investors' liabilities approached half of Albania's gross domestic product. The result, in 1997, was large-scale financial collapse, accompanied by general revolt. The event, known locally as the Lottery Uprising, ended with more than fifteen hundred dead, the government replaced, the state in disarray, foreign nationals evacuated, and seven thousand U.N. peacekeepers on the ground. It is likely that no other society has ever been so completely saturated by pyramid schemes that the state is brought to a point of near-failure. The lesson is clear: Pyramid schemes are not merely immoral and economically irrational for all involved. They are also politically dangerous.

*Joseph MacKay*
*Toronto, Ontario*

## A PROBLEM SOLVER

In his recent Comment, George Packer writes that, despite the apparent activism of Barack Obama's governing style, "it's harder to make out the contours of the philosophy at the core of this dazzling blur of action" (The Talk of the Town, April 13th). He adds that, while some people defend Obama as "basically a pragmatist, who will do what he thinks can work . . . pragmatism is a description of a temperament, not an explanation of a world view." Yet, from Charles Sanders Peirce and William James through John Dewey and E. A. Singer and down to the present day, pragmatism has been a distinct—and a distinctly American—world view. As opposed to the realist or the idealist, the pragmatist sees the world as a place where things happen or they don't, where problems are solved or they aren't, and where progress is achieved by way of experimentation, trial and error. In this sense, it is probably more apt to say that pragmatism is a mind-set *and* a world view. President Obama appears to have both.

*Allen Harrison*
*Point Richmond, Calif.*

•

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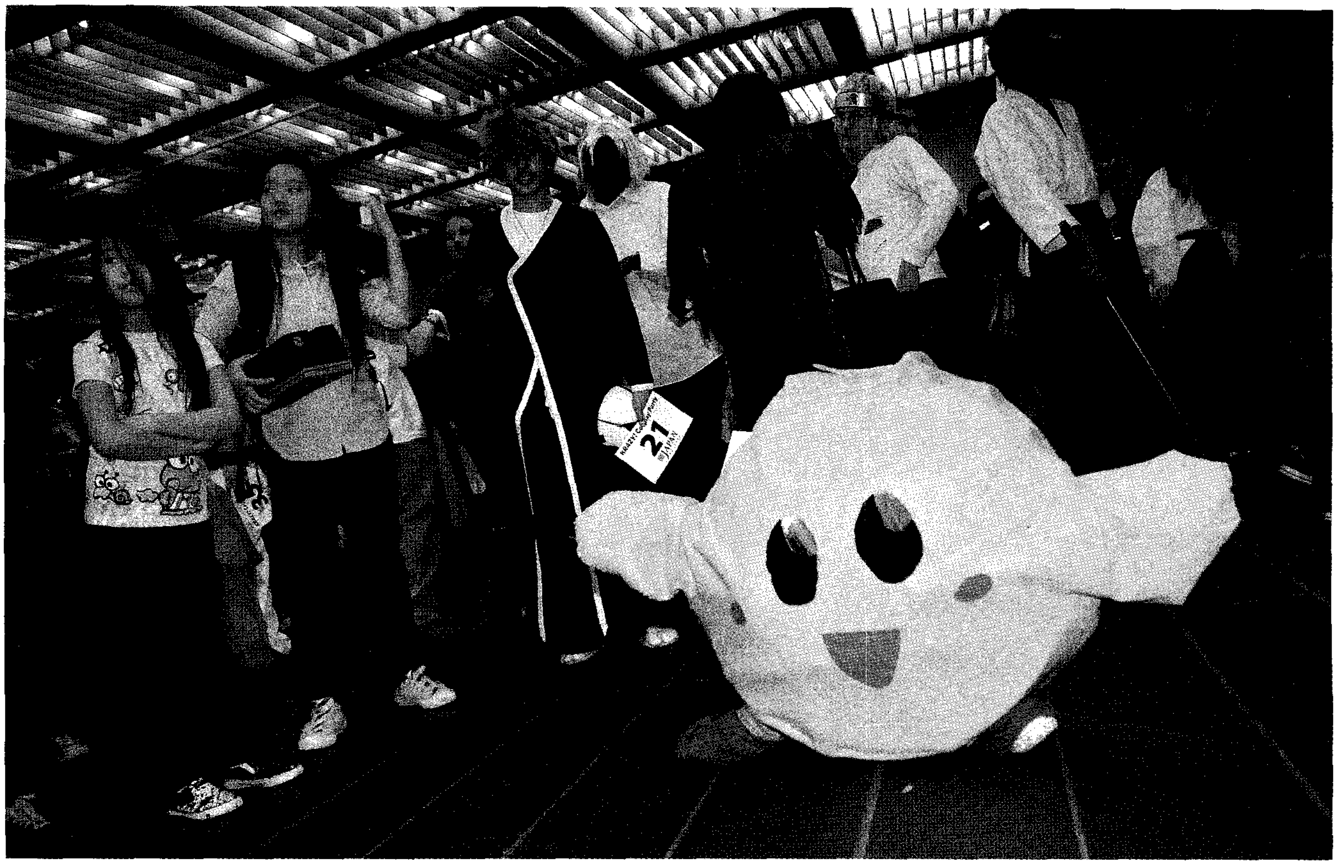

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

| S | M | T | W | T | F | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |

## THIS WEEK

### THE THEATRE
### IT'S A LIVING

Atlantic Theatre Company presents "Offices," a set of one-act comedies by the director Ethan Coen—who, with his brother, Joel, has a film œuvre that includes "Fargo" and "No Country for Old Men." The plays are directed by Neil Pepe, and the cast includes F. Murray Abraham. (See page 6.)

### NIGHT LIFE
### HOT FUSION

The pianist Chick Corea and the guitarist John McLaughlin, two of jazz fusion's founding fathers, worked on Miles Davis's album "Bitches Brew," and have each led their own powerhouse ensembles (Return to Forever and the Mahavishnu Orchestra). Their new group, the Five Peace Band, includes the bassist Christian McBride, the drummer Brian Blade, and the saxophonist Kenny Garrett. It has a run at Jazz at Lincoln Center this week. (See page 8.)

### ART
### PAPER TRAIL

In 2005, the Judith Rothschild Foundation donated around twenty-five hundred drawings to MOMA, most by contemporary artists. The museum's curators chose some three hundred works from the mother lode for "Compass in Hand," from abstractions by Jo Baer and Donald Judd to figures by John Currin and Elizabeth Peyton. (See page 8.)

### CLASSICAL MUSIC
### VOICES OF SPRING

For many of New York's young singers, graduation beckons—but first comes opera. Both Juilliard and the Manhattan School of Music offer their spring shows this week: "Falstaff" and "Die Fledermaus," respectively. (See page 11.)

### READINGS AND TALKS
### GOLDEN PEN

In the fifty years since Philip Roth published the novel "Goodbye, Columbus," he's released book after book of razor-sharp fiction that investigates the hearts and minds of some of literature's most compelling and complex characters. Norman Manea, Greil Marcus, Joyce Carol Oates, and Norman Rush join Roth at Queens College to celebrate his work. (See page 15.)

*"KRAZY!," an exhibit about anima, manga, and video games, at Japan Society. Photograph by Lisa Kereszi.*

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# THE THEATRE
# OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.*

**ACCENT ON YOUTH**
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Samson Raphaelson's comedy, in which a struggling playwright becomes inspired by his secretary and produces a Broadway hit. David Hyde Pierce and Charles Kimbrough star; Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

**DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS**
Eugene O'Neill's 1924 drama, about a woman who has an affair with her stepson, transfers from the Goodman Theatre. Brian Dennehy, Carla Gugino, and Pablo Schreiber star; Robert Falls directs. In previews. Opens April 27. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**EVERYDAY RAPTURE**
Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who goes to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

**EXIT CUCKOO**
Lisa Ramirez wrote and performs this play, about the experiences of nannies in New York. Colman Domingo directs. In previews. Opens April 23. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**HOW SOON IS NOW?**
Bluemouth Inc. incorporates dance and video into this theatre piece, derived from the story of "Peter and the Wolf." In previews. Opens April 24. (Irondale Centre, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 718-488-9233.)

**A NERVOUS SMILE**
Theatre Breaking Through Barriers presents a new play by John Belluso, in which a wealthy couple is raising a child with cerebral palsy. In previews. Opens April 26. (Kirk Theatre, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL**
Allison Janney, Stephanie J. Block, Megan Hilty, and Marc Kudisch star in the musical version of the 1980 movie, with original music and lyrics by Dolly Parton and a book by Patricia Resnick. Joe Mantello directs. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE NORMAN CONQUESTS**
Alan Ayckbourn's comic trilogy transfers from the Old Vic, directed by Matthew Warchus. "Table Manners," "Living Together," and "Round and Round the Garden" all take place over one weekend at an English country house in the nineteen-seventies. In previews. Opens April 23. (Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

**OFFICES**
The world première of three new one-act comedies about the workplace by Ethan Coen, directed by Neil Pepe. The cast includes F. Murray Abraham and Aya Cash. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

**THE PHILANTHROPIST**
Matthew Broderick, Jonathan Cake, Anna Madeley, and Steven Weber star in the Roundabout Theatre Company production of Christopher Hampton's comedy, about a college professor who is oblivious to the world around him. David Grindley directs. In previews. Opens April 26. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

**PUPPET KAFKA**
Drama of Works premières a new play by B. Walker Sampson, which adds marionettes and shadow puppets to a live cast to illustrate the life of Franz Kafka. In previews. Opens April 26. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

**THE SINGING FOREST**
At the Public, the New York première of a play by Craig Lucas ("The Light in the Piazza"), about three generations of a family affected by the Holocaust. The ensemble cast, directed by Mark Wing-Davey, includes Jonathan Groff and Olympia Dukakis. In previews. Opens April 28. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

**SOPHISTRY**
South Ark Stage revives this 1993 comedy by Jonathan Marc Sherman, about a group of New England college students affected by the sexual-harassment accusations made against their philosophy professor. In previews. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**WAITING FOR GODOT**
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece, starring Bill Irwin (as Vladimir) and Nathan Lane (as Estragon). Also with John Goodman (Pozzo) and John Glover (Lucky). Anthony Page directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

**WE ARE DESTROYED**
Howard Fishman wrote this exploration of the story of the Donner party, and his band performs the accompaniment. Ed Schmidt directs. April 24-26. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

# NOW PLAYING

**ANGELA'S MIXTAPE**
Eisa Davis's play, directed by Liesl Tommy, complete with fits of freedom songs and bursts of comical dance, starts off as a rollicking tribute to Davis's aunt, the sixties icon Angela Davis, but it ends up as much more. This New Georges/Hip-Hop Theatre Festival production is a revealing portrait of a young artist (born in 1970, while her aunt is in prison) struggling to find herself, while growing up in the shadow of three enormously strong, brilliant, and successful black women steeped in radical sixties politics. The cast of five women, including the multitalented playwright, is fully committed to what might be the Obama generation's "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf." (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

**LA DIDONE**
The Wooster Group's latest mind attack crossbreeds Francesco Cavalli's 1641 opera with the sixties sci-fi flick "Terrore Nello Spazio," or "Planet of the Vampires," playing the baroque grandeur of the one off the kitschy pseudo-jargon of the other. Aesthetically, the two works are galaxies apart, but there's fun to be had in sussing out the similarities—both find their heroes navigating unfamiliar lands (Carthage, a zombie planet) and dance around the question of free will. Elizabeth LeCompte's staging is elegant and over-stimulating, with a poised performance by Hai-Ting Chinn, as Dido. (Like everyone else, she wears a metallic space suit.) Ultimately, though, the production is more enamored of its own audacity than of either of its source materials, and succeeds primarily as camp. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through April 26.)

**JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE**
Bartlett Sher directs August Wilson's play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**MARY STUART**
Janet McTeer and Harriet Walter star in Peter Oswald's new version of Friedrich Schiller's play from 1800, directed by Phyllida Lloyd. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**NEXT TO NORMAL**
This musical, which skillfully parses family dysfunction and suicidal behavior, puts paid to the old Broadway musical axiom of "no girls, no gags, no chance." In our depressed moment, it's now "no trauma, no transference, no Tony." Well-performed by a cast featuring the ever-popular Alice Ripley and inventively directed by Michael Greif, with music by Tom Kitt and a well-written book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey, who lays out a banquet of psychoanalytic observation for the audience's delectation, the show is always intelligent and sometimes funny, but emotionally claustrophobic. After the antidepressants and the ECT, you do yearn for a smiling face, a lifted heart, and just a smidgen of frivolity. It used to be that the musical was meant to be an escape from care; now it's meant to be an escape from escape: all singing, all dancing despair. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**OTHELLO**
The Theatre for a New Audience production returns to the Duke on 42nd Street for a limited run. Arin Arbus directs. (229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through April 25.)

**THE TOXIC AVENGER**
If you want to get high on the fumes of desolation, then this musical, well directed by John Rando, with a book and lyrics by Joe DiPietro and music and lyrics by David Bryan (based on Lloyd Kaufman's 1984 film of the same name), is probably goofy enough to get you there. Melvin Ferd the Third (Nick Cordero) has been dumped into industrial waste by the mayor's thugs and transformed from geek to freak. The love interest is a blind librarian called Sarah (Sara Chase), who can't see how many blind jokes the musical makes at her expense. Under Rando's direction, the show is a sort of one-stop shop for every piece of vaudeville shtick—and a manifestation of our culture's death-haunted hysteria. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/20/09.) (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

**WHY TORTURE IS WRONG, AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM**
In Christopher Durang's play, directed by Nicholas Martin, the ingénue Felicity (Laura Benanti) spends most of the evening desperately trying to enlist the help of her reactionary parents in annulling her marriage to Zamir (Amir Arison), a Middle Eastern stranger whom she married after a drunken one-night stand, and who she thinks might be a terrorist. The problem here is that Durang can't decide whether he's writing a satire or a sitcom. Durang wants to tee off on torture, right-wing paranoia, and conservative fear-mongering, but in humor, as in golf, the follow-through is as important as the swing, and Durang can't get any distance with his potshots. The evening's one consistent delight is Kristine Nielsen, who plays Luella, Felicity's dithering, theatre-obsessed, put-upon mother, and whose mugging steals what there is of the show. (4/20/09) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

## *Also Playing*

**AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **EXIT THE KING:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JAILBAIT:** Cherry Pit, 155 Bank St. 212-868-4444. Through April 25. **JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **REASONS TO BE PRETTY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **33 VARIATIONS:** O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

# NIGHT LIFE
# ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.*

**BARBÈS**
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (347-422-0248)—April 23: Sporting a résumé that's pure New York, **Andy Statman,** a Queens kid, began his career, in the nineteen-seventies, as a modern-bluegrass mandolinist; took up the clarinet and spearheaded the klezmer revival that's still very

much in force; and is equally likely to be found onstage with Itzhak Perlman, Béla Fleck, or a free-jazz improv group. This gig finds him teamed with Larry Eagles, on drums, and Jim Whitney, on bass. April 27: **Janine Nichols,** the charming singer from the idiosyncratic electric-bass-and-vocals duo Flutterbox, steps out with the violinist **Charlie Burnham,** the guitarist **Brandon Ross,** and the cellist **Jane Scarpantoni.**

**THE BELL HOUSE**
149 7th St., between 2nd and 3rd Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—April 22: **Shilpa Ray & Her Happy Hookers.** Following the demise of her previous band, Beat the Devil, Ray has struck out on her own, further showcasing her seemingly indestructible vocal chords. She screams, growls, and snarls her way through the screeching muck of oil-stained garage rock and backwoods blues, cresting just above the waves of a sonic tumult that threatens to consume her minuscule frame. This tenuous command of a raucous sound makes for a volatile breed of rock and roll.

**FIVE SPOT SUPPER CLUB**
459 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn (718-852-0202)—The monthly party Dig Deeper fills this Brooklyn soul-food spot with the hip-shaking sounds of vintage soul music. Organized by DJ Honky (Richard Lewis) and Mr. Robinson (Michael Robinson), the night features the finest in old vinyl and rare live performances. The two spin 45s from 10 P.M. to 4 A.M., with a midnight set by some of the music's least-heard-from survivors, including, on April 25, the funky belter **Lee Fields,** who is also known as Little J.B. Fields. It's like a mini Ponderosa Stomp in our own back yard. (For more information about the party, visit myspace.com/digdeepernyc.)

**GRAMERCY THEATRE**
127 E. 23rd St. (877-598-8694)—April 23-24: **Lou Reed's Metal Machine Trio.** In 1975, Reed released one of the most inaccessible records of all time, "Metal Machine Music," a sprawling double album of harrowing noise. Using that album as its crucial signifier, this group—Reed, the avant-garde tenor saxophonist Ulrich Krieger, and the Fingerboard Continuum manipulator Sarth Calhoun—runs a vocals-free, envelope-pushing gamut between cacophonous industrial din and meditative ambient music. Posters around town advertising this gig bear a stern disclaimer: "No Songs." Fans expecting "Walk on the Wild Side" should walk on by.

**HIGHLINE BALLROOM**
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—April 28: **Alkaline Trio,** out of Chicago, plays punky music flecked with histrionic misery.

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-570-3949)—April 24: The minimalist rock composer **Rhys Chatham** leads a revival of his influential 1977 piece "Guitar Trio." Chatham, a former curator at the Kitchen in its nineteen-seventies SoHo heyday, studied composition at New York University with the electronic-music pioneer Morton Subotnick before becoming entranced with the Ramones and the burgeoning rock scene around CBGB's. "Guitar Trio" is his first guitar composition using just intonation, a nontraditional tuning system that easily lends itself to drones and trance-inducing effects. Over the years, Chatham expanded his electric-guitar-based orchestrations to include a hundred guitars, but this early work provides the clearest distillation of the slow-building power and hypnotic overtones generated by his compositional style. This performance will be accompanied by a contemporaneous slide show called "Pictures for Music," by the artist **Robert Longo,** one of Chatham's original guitarists, who will also revive that role here.

**NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE**
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—April 24: The ever-dapper **Paul Weller's** latest solo record, "22 Dreams," touches on the various styles he's favored over the years with the Jam and the Style Council, along with a few new ones.

**PIANOS**
158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—April 24-25: The hardworking tubaist **Brian Wolff** continues to re-imagine what can be done with his unwieldy and beautiful instrument. Wolff, formerly a member of the indie-cult trio Drums and Tuba, recently embarked on a solo career, releasing a highly danceable new record called "The Brass Ceiling." The album features an astonishing array of sounds and registers, all of which are generated by Wolff's tuba and by looping devices, processors, and other electronic miscellanea. The songs, which also include Wolff's processed vocals, fluidly meld New Orleans-tinged grooves and haunting neoclassical melodic phrases. His weekend residency runs through May 2.

**TERMINAL 5**
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—April 21-22: Since its 2004 début, the Brooklyn duo **Ratatat** has cleverly ruffled the electro-pop idiom. Following last year's much-lauded album "LP3" and recent remixes by Animal Collective and Yacht, Mike Stroud and Evan Mast play two nights here in the midst of a world tour.

**UNION HALL**
702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-638-4400)—April 25: On her own, the Canadian guitarist and singer **Julie Doiron,** who has played with everyone from the Tragically Hip to Okkervil River, delivers a particularly fragile sound that seems to be verging on an emotional breakdown.

**WEBSTER HALL**
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—April 25: Scotland's **Travis** emerged during the heyday of loutish Britpop, following Oasis's lead in performing loud rock for slack-jawed youths. Their 1999 sophomore album, "The Man Who," however, abandoned brashness in favor of melodic, introspective pop and became a huge hit both here and in the U.K., rubbing shoulders stylistically with the equally plangent Coldplay. Despite a series of subsequent albums, Travis has yet to match that early success. Last year's release, "Ode to J. Smith," found the band edging closer to its rockier roots.

**WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE**
April 26: A night of classical music from northern India with **Pandit Shivkumar Sharma,** a virtuosic master of the *santoor* (a hammer dulcimer) and the tabla wizard **Zakir Hussain.** (Zankel Hall, Seventh Ave. at 57th St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**ALLEN ROOM**
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—April 24: **Herb Alpert** and **Lani Hall.** Alpert's reputation as a full-throttle trumpeter stems from his days leading the hit-making Tijuana Brass. This intimate performance, featuring a piano trio, and his wife, Hall, on vocals, will allow Alpert to cool down his horn. They'll be playing American Songbook standards and bossa-nova classics dating back to Hall's days in Sergio Mendes's Brasil 66.

**BIRDLAND**
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—April 21-25: The annual BossaBrasil Festival features the singer **Emilio Santiago,** who is known as the Nat King Cole of Brazil, along with the guitarist, singer, and composer **Dori Caymmi,** among others.

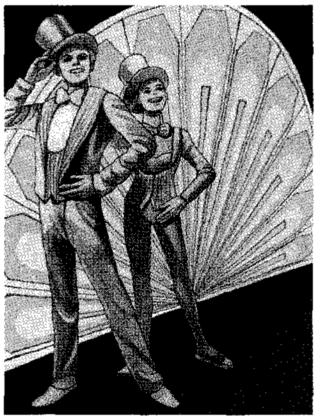
**BLUE NOTE**
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—April 21-26: The vivacious Dominican pianist **Michel Camilo.**

**CAFÉ CARLYLE**
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—April 21-May 30: **Judy Collins** has made the transition from folk deity to cabaret icon in record time. Her high artistry and disarming candor translate well to an intimate room.

**IRIDIUM**
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—April 23-25: The fusion-and-prog-rock guitar god **Allan Holdsworth** is joined by his frequent associate, the

## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## SINGULAR SENSATION

Adam Del Deo and James D. Stern's documentary "Every Little Step" is, perhaps, one of the more heart-wrenching movies you'll see this year. Ostensibly about the casting of several key roles in the 2006 revival of the 1975 hit musical "A Chorus Line," the film is an elegant



AKIKO KATO

examination of the will and spirit it takes to dream a performer's dream. Its true subject is hope, and bewilderment as well: how do people keep doing what they're doing when so much near-lethal rejection is built in? Incorporating interviews with some of the musical's original creators—the composer Marvin Hamlisch is especially brilliant—along with footage from the original production, the entire enterprise has an incandescent ghost hovering over it: that of Michael Bennett. Bennett, who died as a result of AIDS in 1987, conceived and directed "A Chorus Line" when he was little more than thirty years old. He began with the idea that "we"—meaning dancers, performers—were a different breed, and interesting because of that difference. He was right.

—*Hilton Als*

drummer **Chad Wackerman**, among others. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

**JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER**
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—April 23-25: The **Five Peace Band**, a fusion supergroup led by the pianist **Chick Corea** and the guitarist **John McLaughlin**, also features the saxophonist **Kenny Garrett**, the bassist **Christian McBride**, and the drummer **Brian Blade.** Expect epic-length improvisations.

**JAZZ STANDARD**
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—April 21-22: The **Pedro Giraudo Jazz Orchestra** spotlights the Argentinean bassist's compositions and arrangements for big band. April 23-26: The latest project from the rigorously eclectic clarinetist **Don Byron** is the New Gospel Quintet, which draws on spiritual music from Thomas A. Dorsey and others. The group includes the singer **DK Dyson** and the noted drummer **Pheeroan AkLaff.** April 27: The **Mingus Dynasty.**

**SMALLS**
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—April 23: **Noah Preminger,** a young saxophonist receiving recent attention for his work with the trumpeter John McNeil, leads his own quartet, which includes the pianist **Frank Kimbrough.** April 24: A seventies fixture, **Juini Booth** played bass with McCoy Tyner and the legendary drummer Tony Williams, whom he's devoting this tribute set to. Later that night: The drummer E. J. Strickland leads a group that features his brother Marcus on tenor saxophone.

**VILLAGE VANGUARD**
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—April 21-26: The saxophonist **Steve Wilson** brings in a quartet that includes the pianist **Michael Wolff** and the drummer **Victor Lewis.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

# ART
## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April 26. ♦ **"Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600."** Through June 21. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. ♦ **"The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom."** Opens April 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective."** Through May 11. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. ♦ **"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection."** Opens April 22. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Intervals: Julieta Aranda."** Through July 19. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect."** Through May 31. ♦ **"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. ♦ **"Sites."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Sadie Benning: Play Pause."** Opens April 22. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture."** Through May 10. ♦ **"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea."** Through July 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

**ASIA SOCIETY**
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest."** Through Sept. 13. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

*Lou Reed's Metal Machine Trio brings its sonic assault to the Gramercy Theatre.*

PAUL WILLOUGHBY

**COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Fashioning Felt."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

**DRAWING CENTER**
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Unica Zürn: Dark Spring."** Through July 23. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

**FRICK COLLECTION**
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

**INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY**
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now."** Through May 3. ♦ **"This Is Not a Fashion Photograph."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Edward Steichen: In High Fashion."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

**JAPAN SOCIETY**
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

**JEWISH MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

**MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM**
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for The New Yorker."** Through May 24. ♦ **"New at the Morgan: Acquisitions Since 2004."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art."** Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**NEUE GALERIE**
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913."** Through June 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

**NEW MUSEUM**
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus."** Through June 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

**QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART**
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Queens International 4."** Through April 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

**STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM**
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit."** Through June 28. ♦ "Collected: **Propositions on the Permanent Collection."** Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

**CHARLES BURCHFIELD**
The evolution of Burchfield's early watercolors is a bit like "The Wizard of Oz" in reverse. In 1918, the American painter abruptly traded in his fanciful, colorful landscapes (to which he eventually returned) for a stark, wren-colored realism, influ-

enced by the writing of Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and Willa Cather. Burchfield's unpopulated scenes of buildings in rural and small-town America retain the uncanny air of his earlier landscapes. In "Houses in the Snow" (circa 1920), a trio of pitched-roof structures, two huddled close in the snowdrifts, as if trying to keep warm, have an unsettling anthropomorphic air—windows are unblinking eyes and porches gape like mouths. The sagging roof of another ramshackle home, this one accompanied by a single bare-branched tree, looks as lonely as the woman in Hopper's Automat. Through April 25. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111.)

### *Short List*

**JAMES CASTLE:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through April 25. **TACITA DEAN:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through April 30. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Opens April 24. **FRANZ WEST:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through May 2.

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

**ADEL ABDESSEMED**
A pitiless young festivalist, born in Algeria and educated in France, Abdessemed shocks in many mediums, often on a huge scale. Three small planes, of the passenger-jet variety, are de-winged and given interwoven fuselage extensions, in tubes of inflated felt, suggesting a nest of gigantic aeronautical serpents. A boulder from the Grand Canyon is inscribed "DEATH." There is a full-size, apparently torched car in blackened terra-cotta. A hardly watchable video convenes fighting dogs, fighting cocks, snakes, scorpions, and other malevolent critters, along with some unlucky white mice, in a dusty arena where savagery comes as no surprise. Did we mention the razor-wire soccer ball and "Music Box," a rotating oil drum that plinks out "The Ride of the Valkyries"? Through May 9. (David Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

**ALLAN D'ARCANGELO**
D'Arcangelo, who died in 1998, made his mark in the early sixties with a sandwich of styles: Pop imagery snugged into formal tropes of hard-edged abstraction. In the late sixties and the seventies, he tended toward Ralston Crawford-ish industrial landscape with surreal nuances and hints of social commentary. The show samples the restless D'Arcangelo repertoire. It includes his one Pop icon: "Marilyn" (1962), a blank Monroe face with slots for paper-doll features, which are arrayed to the right with a dangling pair of real scissors. There is something poignant, while straining, in how this sensitive soul held himself to standards of muscular decisiveness. Through May 2. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

**ELAINE MAYES**
All but one of Mayes's portraits of young people in Haight-Ashbury were made in 1968, when San Francisco's hippies shared the streets with runaway teens and a growing population of drifters and drug addicts. The flower children were no longer so blissed-out, but they sat for their portraits with a touching gravity and looked into Mayes's camera as if they knew they could trust it and her. You can't help but notice the bare feet, long hair, beads, fringe, and granny shawls, but these are only incidentally fashion photographs. They're true portraits—understated and unsentimental but quietly astonishing, as if August Sander had been around for the Summer of Love. Through May 9. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

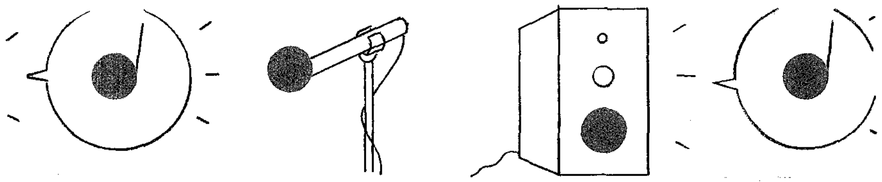
**RICHARD ALLEN MORRIS**
Here's perhaps the best living septuagenarian artist you've never heard of. An outsider with insider links (John Baldessari is an old friend), Morris toys ingeniously with conventions of painting and sculpture in San Diego, where he has worked in bookstores for the past fifty years. Tiny abstractions inventory and burlesque types of "expressive" brushwork. Pictures of faces in profile are painted too badly or too well, or somehow both, to define the Pop style they suggest. Best are Morris's "guns": detritus reliefs that distantly assume pistol and rifle shapes with very free, infectious cadenzas of wood scraps, shoe parts, fabric, rope, nails, plastic, and, say, a brush, a clothespin, a whistle, a paint tube, or a toy nightstick. Through May 9. (Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055.)

**MARCIA RESNICK**
The captioned black-and-white photographs from Resnick's 1978 book, "Re-visions," subvert the innocent appeal of children's books with a sketchy narrative that hints at adolescent repression and rebellion. Resnick's heroine, seen only in fragments, is a budding but bumbling Lolita ("Re-visions" was dedicated to Humbert Humbert), torn between "Howdy Doody" and spin the bottle, bratty mischief and stuffing her bra. She longs to grow up and run away, but the stars in her eyes are from a game of jacks and her acting out falls short of genuine liberation. Although the form and playfulness of Resnick's photographs recall William Wegman's work from the same period, their twisted remembrance of things past is hilariously original. Through May 16. (Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883.)

**PETER SAUL**
Saul's recent paintings continue to electrify peaks and pits of narcissism—grandiosity and self-loathing, in arrogant and abject fantasies of murder, rape, and all-around depravity—with sweetening effects of effulgent color (purple-shaded purples, green-shaded greens, and so on) and pillowy texture. Why is it interesting to behold Stalin and Mao beheading legions of Nazis and Chinese Nationalists, respectively? Well, they do it against a field of sumptuous blue. Like a kid seeking the aid of his older brother in a fight, Saul dials up Willem de Kooning, with a quite wonderfully boop-boop-a-dooped "Woman." Through May 23. (Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190.)

**MASATO SETO**
The Tokyo-based photographer, making his U.S. début here, takes a detached, sociological approach to portraiture with a series of glossy color pictures of solitary salesgirls at the counters of tiny, glass-front roadside shops in Taiwan. Because their product, a betel-nut-based stimulant called *binran*, is not immediately evident, the leggy, pretty young women appear to be the stores' only attraction. Seated in the glare of neon and florescent lights, they look doll-like and available, but they're bored, not flirtatious—working girls with blank stares waiting for their shift to end. Seto appreciates their mix of toughness and vulnerability, but he never gets close enough to disturb their isolation. Through May 9. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

**JOHN WATERS**
More movie jokes and conceptual japes from the camp classicist. Altered film stills give us Hollywood child actors smoking cigarettes. "Rear projection" is literalized: photographs of film frames are beamed onto bare buttocks. All but one in a sequence of black-and-white stills of iconic line deliveries are subtitled in pig Latin: "Asten-fay our-yay eatbelts-say," "Osebud-ray," etc. The kicker is a translation from the same: Ginger Rogers in "Gold Diggers of 1933," "We're in the money." (How cute was young Ginger Rogers? How blue is the sky?) Some new sculptures are unrewardingly laborious. Waters is finest when most laconic, as in empathetically assuring us, "Contemporary art hates you." Through May 2. (Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889.)



LAURENT CILLUFO

## POP NOTES
## ORGAN DONOR

The organist, songwriter, and arranger extraordinaire Booker T. Jones is one of the legends of soul music. A multi-instrumentalist as a child and later a student in music composition at Indiana University, he went on to head up the Stax house band, Booker T. & the MG's, which backed everyone from Otis Redding to Rufus Thomas, and to co-write hits like "I've Never Found a Girl (To Love Me Like You Do)" and "I Love You More Than Words Can Say." Jones also released a number of acclaimed records of his own material—his catalogue goes much deeper than the immortal "Green Onions," and even includes an album-length tribute to "Abbey Road," called "McLemore Avenue"—and, after leaving the group in the early seventies, became a top-drawer session player and producer, responsible for Bill Withers's "Ain't No Sunshine" and Willie Nelson's "Stardust," among other records.

Jones's new solo album, **"Potato Hole"** (Anti-), is his first in two decades, and throughout he is backed not only by the Southern-rock stalwarts Drive-By Truckers but also by Neil Young. If this sounds more like rock-and-roll than Southern soul, that's because it is. The group establishes its credentials on the opening track, "Pound It Out," on which Jones solos over a lumbering riff that could be a leftover from a Crazy Horse rehearsal. The majority of songs are Jones originals—though he's most famous as an organist, he writes on guitar, and so is a natural match for this set of musicians—and they range from atmospheric mid-tempo numbers reminiscent of "Blonde on Blonde"-era Bob Dylan ("She Breaks") to open-sky songs filled to capacity with Young's tidal guitar ("Native New Yorker"). There is also a trio of covers that demonstrate Jones's musical restlessness. Tom Waits's shuffling, bluesy "Get Behind the Mule" and the Drive-By Truckers' own warm, spacious "Space City" receive faithful, somewhat understated treatments in which Jones's organ is as articulate as any vocalist. Outkast's "Hey Ya!," on the other hand, goes in the opposite direction, and then some. While the rootsy guitar and drums translate the original nicely and the chorus is appropriately exuberant, too much of the song is spent replicating Andre 3000's vocals with choppy organ work. It's a misstep, but a brave one, and it demonstrates the entire project's reluctance to play it safe.

—*Ben Greenman*

### *Short List*

**SOPHIE CALLE:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through May 22. **JAMAL CYRUS / ELODIE PONG:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through May 2. **JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through May 16. **YAYOI KUSAMA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 27. **MATVEY LEVENSTEIN:** Goldston, 530 W. 25th St. 212-206-7887. Through May 9. **NAM JUNE PAIK:** James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Through May 30. **PABLO PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **SHAHZIA SIKANDER:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through

May 2. **RYAN TRECARTIN & LIZZIE FITCH:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through May 16.

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**SIMRYN GILL**
The ravages of time turn up unexpected beauty in Gill's quietly dazzling show. "My Own Private Angkor," a series of black-and-white photographs of the interiors of Malaysian apartments—constructed prior to an economic downturn and never occupied—recall the spectral mysteries of Francesca Woodman. The feathery bronze sculpture "Untitled (Interiors)" is a cast of the cracks in a drought-devastated riverbed in Gill's native Australia. In "Mine," a constellation of spheres arranged on the floor, the materials shift from termite mounds and exotic tree bark to balls of wire, ivy, and rubber bands, scavenged in the streets of New York. Through May 2. (Williams, 313 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757.)

### *Short List*

**LAURIE ANDERSON:** Location One, 26 Greene St. 212-334-3347. Through May 2. **JOSH BLACKWELL:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through May 3. **JENNIFER BORNSTEIN:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through May 2. **ANDREW KUO:** Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212. Through May 9. **MICHELLE LOPEZ:** Preston, 301 Broome St. 212-431-1105. Through May 17. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Opens April 28.

## GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

**JAMES HYDE**
For twenty years, Hyde has been dismantling painting—stripping it down to color, texture, image, and form, often in three dimensions. In his new photo-assemblages, pictures of construction sites are embellished with chunks of wood, and stripes of red, yellow, and white. Lumps of Styrofoam and papier-mâché project like tumors from closeups of trees. Crisp oblongs are painted on digital images of lush weeds. Hyde has made much ado over the years about his works being abstraction (the long arm of Clement Greenberg), but here he roughs up the conventions of romantic landscape with the grit of the street. Through April 26. (Southfirst, 60 N. 6th St. 718-599-4884.)

## DANCE

**NEW YORK CITY BALLET**
The spring season is here, beginning with a night of Balanchine ballets that span much of his career, from the spare, brilliant "Concerto Barocco" (which was on the company's opening program in 1948) to the taut modernism of "Symphony in Three Movements." The Romantic Balanchine is represented by his sophisticated and decadent "La Valse," and his classical panache by the bravura display "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," made for the vivacious Violette Verdy in 1960. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. April 28 at 7:30. Through June 21.)

**AILEY II**
At the Ailey Citigroup, Alvin Ailey's junior troupe presents two programs, both of which include "Movin' On," by George Faison. (405 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. "Repertory Favorites": April 22-23 and April 25 at 8 and April 26 at 3. "New Works": April 24 at 8, April 25 at 3, and April 26 at 7.)

**MOVEMENT RESEARCH SPRING FESTIVAL**
For thirty years now, Movement Research has been encouraging, subsidizing, and generally nurturing process-based experimentation. The anniversary edition of the festival, "Roll Call," opens at the New Museum, with a documentary about the institution by Kyle Wilamowski and performances designed by Mary Overlie and Faye Driscoll. After that, names-out-of-a-hat collaborations, a dancing tour of the Lower East Side, and a global game of telephone punctuate a schedule of panels and parties. For more information, visit www.movementresearch.org/rollcall. (Various locations. 212-598-0551. April 23-May 2.)

**"PETER THE GREAT"**
City Center hosts a gala celebrating the eightieth birthday of Peter Pestov, a master teacher of male dancers at Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet Academy for thirty years. He trained the virtuosi Vladimir Malakhov and Nikolai Tsiskaridze, as well as the evening's host, the Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, the choreographer-in-residence at American Ballet Theatre. Malakhov, Tsiskaridze, and A.B.T.'s Sascha Radetsky will dance, along with Yekaterina Kondaurova, a redheaded powerhouse from the Kirov. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. April 23 at 7.)

**"E-MOVES"**
A "Ten for Ten" evening brings back an alum for each year, "Legends and Legacies" pairs a choreographer with a dancemaker he or she has influenced, and the "E-merging/E-volving" program introduces up-and-comers. (Harlem Stage at the Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240. April 23-25 at 7:30.)

**"THE BARNARD PROJECT"**
This partnership between Barnard and Dance Theatre Workshop exposes young dancers to experienced choreographers, while offering the dancemakers the chance to work with larger groups than they could usually afford. This year the mentors are the powerfully political Zimbabwe-born choreographer Nora Chipaumire, the club-dance-influenced Nicholas Leichter, the postmodernist Susan Rethorst, and the Minneapolis-based choreographer Morgan Thorson. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 23-24 at 7:30 and April 25 at 2 and 7:30.)

**JOE GOODE PERFORMANCE GROUP**
The San Francisco company returns to New York with a new member, a puppet created by Basil Twist, which serves as the protagonist of "Wonderboy," a disjointed fable about a boy's struggle to stop aching at the window and brave the world. That aching, spelled out in text and song, and the over-all aggrandizement of the ostracized artist are hard to take, but the integration of the puppet with the rest of the cast, who make a dance of handing him off, is novel and lovely. The less successful accompanying piece is an unfocussed gender-switching fantasia on Western themes called "Maverick Strain." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 23-25 at 8 and April 26 at 2 and 7:30.)

**"FOOD FOR THOUGHT"**
The guest curators for Danspace Project's annual benefit for the AIDS Service Center are Peggy Cheng, Wally Cardona, and Tere O'Connor; dancers include Foofwa d'Imobilité, Beth Gill, and Daria Fain and Human Behavior Explorers. Tickets are five dollars with two cans of food. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. April 23-25 at 8:30.)

**SOLEDAD BARRIO AND NOCHE FLAMENCA**
The no-frills flamenco of this beloved troupe is best appreciated in more intimate spaces, but the New Victory isn't too big for details to register. Considering the theatre's family-friendly approach, a little distance might be welcome: experiencing the searing severity of Soledad Barrio up close could frighten a child. Few adults come away unmoved. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. April 24 at 7, April 25 at 2 and 7, and April 26 at noon and 5. Through May 3.)

**"DANCE/SPEAK: THE LIFE OF AGNES DE MILLE"**
New York Theatre Ballet—a chamber company specializing in small-scale twentieth-century works—presents a tribute to Agnes de Mille's pioneering career, with excerpts from many of her productions, some not performed in years. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. April 24-25 at 7:30.)

**JENNIFER MILLER**
Just when the financial system seems most like a circus, leave it to the downtown scene's woman with a beard to act out fantasies of revenge on

## TABLES FOR TWO
## SCHNIPPER'S QUALITY KITCHEN

SCHNIPPER'S

620 Eighth Ave., at 41st St. (212-921-2400)—Generally, if a diner's first thought when trying a new restaurant is, Is this a chain?, the subsequent meal proves to be, if a little boring, pleasantly safe—reassuring whether in New York, Kansas City, or Seattle. Schnipper's Quality Kitchen, which opened recently in the ground floor of the Times building, has all the hallmarks of a franchise-ready operation: a crisp aesthetic that utilizes three colors (Venetian red, sky blue, silver); bathrooms that are accessible only with a code; a slogan that declares "'Quality' Is Our Middle Name!" The capstone here is a rectangular pocket-size pager that alerts you, by blinking and vibrating and squawking like a novice duck caller, that your food is up. Depending on your mood, it evokes either a Taser or a certain electrical device that nineteenth-century doctors used to alleviate female hysteria. Although owners Andrew and Jonathan Schnipper deny that their new place is a fast-food joint—and so far it's the only outlet—at first impression, it sure feels like one.

Schnipper's took root a few years ago, when, in the spirit of Jane and Michael Stern, the brothers travelled around the country in search of great roadside fare. Upon return, they devised a menu of their favorites. There's a green-chile cheeseburger from New Mexico, some fish tacos from San Diego, and a chicken club courtesy of the Rockies (they are good there, evidently). Most of the "classics" were left untouched ("How can you beat a New York hot dog?" Andrew says), but others got some gussying up—one burger, for example, comes with arugula, and the best fries are sweet potato. The sandwiches—mozzarella and tomato, veggies and goat cheese, to name the artsier ones—are built around ciabatta, sourdough, or multigrain bread. The salads are substantial, not too heavily dressed, and involve figs and beets and toasted pine nuts. Sweets take the form of more than a dozen milkshakes, any of which leaves you blissfully lethargic. (One made with salted caramel inspired a recent diner to wonder who in the world doesn't love a great shake. Echoing the glory days of the roadside café, he answered his own question: "Communists.") Yet, even amid all of this, it's hard to escape the fact that one can only do so much to empower food prepared on a flattop grill. You've got to wonder about the quality of a compliment often overheard at Schnipper's: "It's better than fast food." (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $3.50-$11.99.)

—*Mike Peed*

HONORE BROWN

Bernie Madoff. Who better to theatricalize a Ponzi scheme than a juggler? "Cracked Ice; or, the Jewels of the Forbidden Skates" promises to be a high-camp romp on the line between tragedy and farce. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. April 25-26 at 8. Through May 10.)

**"CELEBRATING DIAGHILEV IN MUSIC AND DANCE"**
To mark the hundredth anniversary of the first performance by the Ballets Russes, the dance historian Lynn Garafola, under the auspices of Columbia University's Harriman Institute and Barnard College, has conceived an evening of masterworks from the company's repertoire, including Stravinsky's powerful cantata "Les Noces" and Nijinsky's "Afternoon of a Faun." (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 25 at 8.)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

## OPERA

**METROPOLITAN OPERA**
The final performance of **"L'Elisir d'Amore,"** featuring Nicole Cabell, Joseph Calleja, Franco Vassallo, and Simone Alaimo; Maurizio Benini conducts. (April 22 at 8.) ♦ The Met bids farewell to its Otto Schenk production of Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen," which has been satisfying traditionalists for more than twenty years with its literal depiction of primordial rivers, misty mountaintops, and gnarled subterranean lairs. **"Das Rheingold"** provides a primer for the cycle, introducing the crooked bargain that undoes the gods. James Morris, as Wotan, heads a distinguished ensemble cast that features Wendy Bryn Harmer, Yvonne Naef, Richard Paul Fink, and, in the roles of Fasolt and Fafner, the thrilling René Pape and the redoubtable John Tomlinson; James Levine conducts with a patient, familiar touch, but knows when to let the orchestra roar. (April 23 at 8.) ♦ With Albert Dohmen replacing Morris. (April 27 at 8.) ♦ **"Don Giovanni,"** with Barbara Frittoli, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Erin Wall, Peter Mattei (in the title role), Samuel Ramey, and Pavol Breslik; Louis Langrée. (April 24 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ David McVicar's fine new production of **"Il Trovatore"** successfully reclaims Verdi's ardent melodrama for the house. This performance features Hasmik Papian, Dolora Zajick, Marco Berti, and Željko Lučić; Riccardo Frizza. (April 25 at 8:30.) ♦ **"Götterdämmerung,"** the final chapter of the "Ring" cycle, is a musical and literary tapestry—spun largely from the strands of human evil—of an almost Shakespearean density. The most formidable of operas, its first performance this season features Katarina Dalayman, Margaret Jane Wray, Yvonne Naef, Christian Franz, Iain Paterson, Richard Paul Fink, and John Tomlinson; Levine. (April 25 at noon.) ♦ **"Die Walküre"** is generally the favorite among the "Ring" cycle's four operas and the one that most easily stands alone; it finds the gods making a last-ditch effort to save themselves and the world of men. Iréne Theorin makes a welcome début as an athletic, feminine Brünnhilde with a gently disarming voice. Also with Morris, Dalayman, Adrianne Pieczonka, Naef, Plácido Domingo, and Tomlinson; Levine. (April 28 at 6:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

**MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE: "DIE FLEDERMAUS"**
With ever-returning spring comes conservatory opera in New York. The two top schools are literally going to head to head; first off (by half an hour) is Manhattan's production of Johann Strauss II's eternally frothy operetta of Viennese high-bourgeois morality, which can withstand any production a director wants to throw at it. This director is Dona D. Vaughn; Kynan Johns conducts. (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 917-493-4428. April 22 and April 24 at 7:30 and April 26 at 2:30.)

**JUILLIARD OPERA CENTER: "FALSTAFF"**
The Juilliard School reaches for the heights, staging a production of Verdi's valedictory masterpiece, directed by Stephen Wadsworth. The cast features (in the role of Fenton) Paul Appleby, a winner of the Met's 2009 National Council Auditions; Keri-Lynn Wilson, known socially as the wife of Peter Gelb, conducts. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. April 22 and April 24 at 8 and April 26 at 2. For information about tickets, call 212-769-7406.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC**
The orchestra gives free rein to one of its favorite conductors, Riccardo Muti, who indulges his passion for out-of-the-way Italian music in a program that features such rarities as the Overture to Verdi's "Giovanna d'Arco," the same composer's ballet music for "I Vespri Siciliani," and the young Puccini's "Preludio Sinfonico," along with a big crowd-pleaser, Respighi's "Pines of Rome." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. April 22-23 at 7:30, April 24 at 2, and April 25 at 8.)

**ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S: "ANDRÉ PREVIN AT 80"**
Previn, the peripatetic conductor and composer, is reaching his ninth decade, and Carnegie Hall is celebrating in a big way. In this concert, he leads one of his favorite orchestras (and three of his favorite soloists) in a program of his music that includes not only the world première of his Concerto for Violin, Viola, and Orchestra (with Anne-Sophie Mutter and Yuri Bashmet) but also two arias from his opera "A Streetcar Named Desire" (with Renée Fleming) and the Violin Concerto ("Anne-Sophie"). (212-247-7800. April 26 at 2.)

**CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**
The Philadelphia conservatory's great orchestra returns to Carnegie Hall with one of its distinguished alumni, Michael Stern, conducting. The all-Russian program features Stravinsky's "Petrushka" (the 1947 version), Prokofiev's Symphony Concertante (with the cellist Carter Brey, principal of the New York Philharmonic), and a selection of excerpts from Prokofiev's ballet "Romeo and Juliet." (212-247-7800. April 28 at 8.)

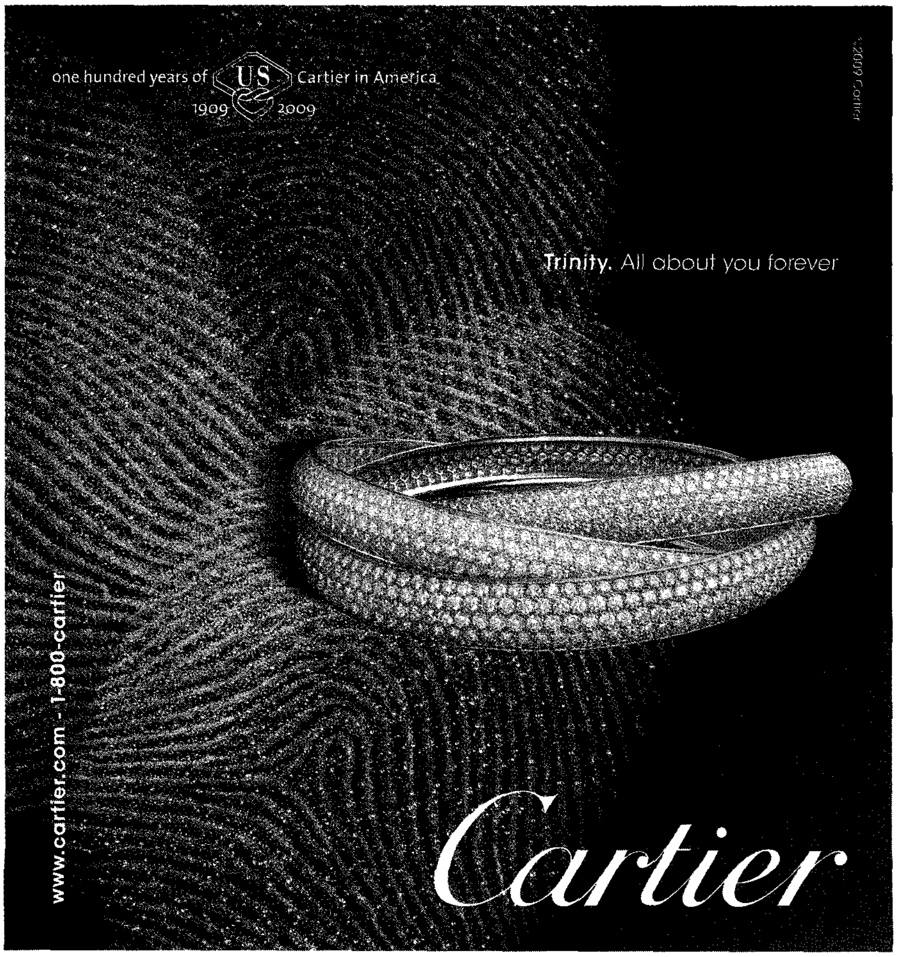
## RECITALS

**JOHN TAVENER'S "TOWARDS SILENCE"**
The Rubin Museum, focussed on Himalayan art, becomes a hotbed of new music this week. This concert offers the world première of a work by the deeply spiritual English composer, performed on the museum's spiral staircase by four string quartets—the Medici, the Attacca, the Corigliano, and the Jasper—and a player on Tibetan bowl. (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000. April 23 at 8. For full schedule, see www.rmanyc.org.)

**ERIC OWENS**
The young American bass-baritone, who has brought his capacious and expressive voice to major roles in such operas as "Doctor Atomic" (at the Met) and "Grendel," comes to Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall for his New York recital début, a varied program of songs by Mozart, Wolf (the "Michelangelo Lieder"), Brahms, and Elgar. (212-247-7800. April 24 at 7:30.)

**KRONOS QUARTET: TERRY RILEY'S "IN C"**
An all-star performance of the benchmark work of the minimalist movement features not only the famed quartet but also such artists as the composers Philip Glass and Osvaldo Golijov (on keyboards), the pi-pa player Wu Man, So Percussion, and Riley himself (on organ and vocals), all coördinated by Dennis Russell Davies. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 24 at 8.)

**TRIO SOLISTI**
The ensemble—the most exciting piano trio in America—gives a concert at Judson Memorial Church, a vibrant program featuring music by Piazzolla ("Four Seasons of Buenos Aires"), Gershwin, Turina, Paul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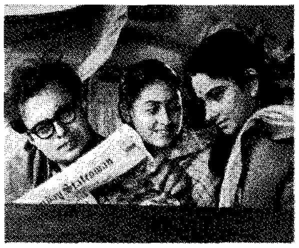
## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## HOME AND AWAY

Arati (Madhabi Mukherjee), the beautiful middle-class housewife in Satyajit Ray's "Mahanagar" ("The Big City"), from 1963 (screening April 22 and April 25 at Film Society of Lincoln Center), takes a job in a Calcutta office in order to earn more money for her family, and her act, though necessary, throws everyone around her into turmoil. Her husband, a rather vain mediocrity, is ashamed that he can't keep her at home; her father-in-law withdraws into silence; her overbearing boss condescends to her and flirts with her. The basic themes are feminist—women should be free to make their own choices—but the family situation (six people living in three small rooms) is captured in such fleshy immediacy and psychological detail that one never thinks of the film as the demonstration of a thesis. Intimacy is Ray's natural mode—the silent passing of mood between husband and wife, the transient moments when some unexpected and awkward event falls into daily life. Mukherjee's performance is at the film's center—a progression from meek passivity to confident self-assertion, with punishment for such outrageous behavior dramatized along the way.

—*David Denby*



SATYAJIT RAY FILM AND STUDY COLLECTION, UCSC

Schoenfield, and, with the soprano Amy Burton, songs by Paul Moravec (the New York première of "Vita Brevis"). (55 Washington Sq. Park. April 24 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

**BARGEMUSIC**
April 24 at 8: Matt Haimovitz, the doyen of the radical cello, is often found making music in bars and coffeehouses. He comes to the floating chamber-music series, however, to perform an arrangement of Bach's Goldberg Variations with two good friends (the violinist Jonathan Crow and the violist Douglas McNabney). ♦ April 25 at 8 and April 26 at 3: The superb American String Quartet lives up to its name by performing two American masterworks—the deliciously ruminative Quartet by Irving Fine, and the sparkling Quartet No. 1 by another Bostonian, Walter Piston—as well as a newer piece, "Triptych," by Robert Sirota, head of the Manhattan School of Music. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

**RENÉ PAPE**
The towering German bass, in town to sing in the Met's "Ring," graces Carnegie Hall in another New York recital début, performing lieder by Schubert, Wolf (the Michelangelo songs, again), and Schumann ("Dichterliebe"); the estimable Brian Zeger accompanies him. (212-247-7800. April 25 at 8.)

**TOKYO STRING QUARTET**
The pianist Alon Goldstein joins the renowned group in an all-Beethoven program that features the Sonata for Violin and Piano in F Major ("Spring"), as well as two Quartets from the Op. 18 cycle (in C Minor and B-Flat Major). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 25 at 8.)

**JEFFREY KAHANE**
World and New York premières—by Kenneth Frazelle, Nico Muhly, and by the pianist's son, Gabriel Kahane—are featured in Kahane's Alice Tully Hall program, which also includes works by Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff, and Schubert (the Sonata in A Major, D. 959). (212-721-6500. April 26 at 5.)

**FRIENDS & ENEMIES OF NEW MUSIC**
Paul Sperry, a legend in the new-music community and a tenor who premièred works by Bernstein, Henze, and Stockhausen, receives a seventy-fifth birthday tribute from the group, a concert in which such composers as Robert Beaser, Daron Hagen, Paul Moravec, and John Musto will accompany Sperry, the soprano Katharine Dain, and the baritone David Krohn in their own songs. (Good Shepherd-Faith Church, 152 W. 66th St. April 26 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

**"GUITAR PLUS" SERIES**
Courtenay Budd and William Ferguson, two charming young singers, join the admired guitarist David Leisner in works by Dominick Argento (the classic "Letters from Composers"), Villa-Lobos, Schubert, Gershwin, and Osvaldo Golijov. (Engleman Recital Hall, Baruch College, 55 Lexington Ave. 646-312-4085. April 28 at 8.)

## MOVIES OPENING

**FIGHTING**
A drama, directed by Dito Montiel, about a young man (Channing Tatum) who becomes a bare-knuckle boxer. Co-starring Terrence Howard. Opening April 24. (In wide release.)

**THE INFORMERS**
A drama, based on a novel by Bret Easton Ellis (who co-wrote the script) and directed by Gregor Jordan, about the interlocking lives of hedonists in Los Angeles in the nineteen-eighties. Starring Billy Bob Thornton, Kim Basinger, Mickey Rourke, and Winona Ryder. Opening April 24. (In wide release.)

**NURSERY UNIVERSITY**
A documentary, directed by Marc H. Simon, about the difficulties of the preschool-application process in New York City. Opening April 24. (ImaginAsian.)

**THE SOLOIST**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 24. (In wide release.)

**A TOUCH OF SPICE**
Tassos Boulmetis directed this comic drama, about a Greek man's passionate relationship with food. In Greek. Opening April 24. (Cinema Village.)

**TREELESS MOUNTAIN**
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening April 22. (Film Forum.)

**TYSON**
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening April 24. (In limited release.)

## NOW PLAYING

**ADVENTURELAND**
The year is 1987, and a bunch of misfits who work at a dreary amusement park in Pittsburgh spend the summer grousing, toking up, and making out with each other. Greg Mottola's autobiographical movie is tenderly funny and lovable but also organically conceived—the colors, the music, and the moods all flow together. The picture has a melancholy lilt. The hero, James Brennan (Jesse Eisenberg), intellectual and excessively self-conscious, falls in love with Em (Kristen Stewart), a beautiful girl who hates her life and is lost in a sordid affair; James, making many mistakes along the way, slowly finds himself. This coming-of-age story is enlivened by Mottola's special generosity toward balled-up smart people who angrily reject conventional success yet remain desperate for acceptance. The manic Bill Hader and a silent, abashed Kristen Wiig play the couple that run the place; Martin Starr is a morosely unattractive Russian-lit major who complains about everything in the lugubrious drone of a campus coffee-shop wit. The only weak bit of casting is the Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds, who's too timid to play a good-looking cad with the proper conviction. The ghastly music playing endlessly on the park's loudspeakers is relieved by the music that the kids play for themselves, including Lou Reed, the Cure, and Hüsker Dü.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/13/09.) (In wide release.)

**ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL**
Anybody schooled in "This Is Spinal Tap" could be forgiven for assuming that there was no further amusement, let alone rarer emotions, to be mined from heavy metal. Somehow, though, Sacha Gervasi's documentary digs deep into a real-life case—the attempted resurrection of Anvil, who were founded in the early nineteen-seventies and banged heads with fame in the eighties—to emerge with a saga of devotion and perseverance that seems at once touching and absurd. Gervasi is especially fortunate in having the founding fathers of the group, Robb Reiner and Steve (Lips) Kudlow, now in creased middle age, to guide us through its many downs and very occasional ups. The action stretches from their native Canada to Transylvania, via Japan and Stonehenge (the last being an obvious must-see for any druid-haired rocker). By the end, to our surprise, we mind very much whether the fortunes of Anvil are set to soar or doomed to lurch once more; if most of their music sounds like a fight in a lumber mill, who cares?—*Anthony Lane* (4/20/09) (In limited release.)

**THE BIRDCAGE**
Mike Nichols's 1996 remake of "La Cage aux Folles" (from a script by Elaine May), relocated to Miami's South Beach, hews closely to the story line, the set pieces, the shticks. Once again, the revue director (Robin Williams) learns that his son (Dan Futterman, who would later write "Capote") is about to marry the daughter (Calista Flockhart) of a moralistic right-wing politician (Gene Hackman). The son asks his father to pose as a straight cultural diplomat, which throws his father and the diva (Nathan Lane) into a panic. The remake is just as good-natured, and far more "professional," than the original, though also far less magical. But some of the throwaway gags are delicious—such as a TV announcer saying that an episode of the "Tonight Show" will feature Yasir Arafat and Kate Moss. Lane triumphs in the climactic scene, when he dons a getup and attitude reminiscent of Barbara Bush and humors Hackman's robust fascist, the straightest of straight men. And there are

riotous ensemble bits, as when all the major characters (including Hank Azaria's gaudy houseboy) chime in on their favorite "My Fair Lady" show tune, proving that family values and gay culture intersect neatly where Hollywood meets Broadway.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; April 22-23.)

*"Treeless Mountain," directed by So Yong Kim, opens April 22.*

EDWARD KINSELLA

**THE COOL WORLD**

In the hot Harlem summer of 1963, a teen-ager, Duke Custis (Hampton Clanton), bored with school and dreaming of action, pesters a local mobster, Priest (Carl Lee), to sell him the gun that will make him the big man in his gang, the Royal Pythons, and win him renown as a "cool killer." Shirley Clarke's vibrant, unflinching, streetwise drama, released in 1964, is a masterwork of cinéma-vérité composition. Her teeming cast of mostly nonprofessional actors portrays the full spectrum of Duke's life, from school and home to his posse and the rival gang, the Wolves, and she pitches their performances to a delicately heightened concentration. The script, based on a novel by Warren Miller, is equally wide-ranging, with its depictions of relationships stripped raw by rough circumstances. Friendship, sex, and family life are all shadowed by drugs, violence, police brutality, and the relentless struggle for money, and these crises are given voice in soliloquies of vernacular eloquence, whether from strivers or derelicts. Clarke's images endow the characters' energies with a burnished, sculptural grandeur and embrace street life with a keenly attentive, unsentimental avidity. Music by Mal Waldron, performed by Dizzy Gillespie, exemplifies the range of moods, from exuberance to despair, and the story's inevitable arc, through all its meanderings, has a rueful, epic power.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; April 22 and April 25.)

**DUPLICITY**

The writer-director Tony Gilroy at play. In the first scene of this combined romantic comedy and caper movie, Claire Stenwick (Julia Roberts), a C.I.A. operative, and Ray Koval (Clive Owen), an MI6 agent, meet at a sunny garden party at the American Embassy in Dubai, and we immediately know we're in fast company—the stars' bantering rhythm is so natural and easy that it's already an early stage of sex. Claire and Ray then leave national service, join rival cosmetics firms, and try to steal the formula for an important new product. The sardonic joke animating "Duplicity" is that corporate espionage is now carried out with the same complex scams, ploys, and thefts that rival intelligence services used at the height of the Cold War. Gilroy is conning us, too, with a series of flashbacks to different places (including a beautiful stretch of Rome's old city), in which Ray and Claire meet and conduct variations on the same conversation again and again. Are they really working together? The characters lie, test, probe, reverse themselves, fall into bed and out of it. The trickiness may add little of substance, but the stars' alertness to each other's moods is charming and often richly funny and sexy. With Paul Giamatti and Tom Wilkinson, as rival megalomaniac C.E.O.s. Edited by John Gilroy.—*D.D.* (3/30/09) (In wide release.)

**GOODBYE SOLO**

A taxi passenger named William (Red West), perhaps seventy, a pouchy-eyed white Southerner, demands to be taken, in a week's time, to a mountain perch outside the city called Blowing Rock. We're in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the driver, Solo (Souleymane Sy Savane), a Senegalese immigrant, young, handsome, and endlessly cheerful, refuses to help William carry out his apparent plan for suicide. Solo tries to reconcile his passenger to life, even moving in with him in his motel room, where they make a very strange couple. The independent writer-director Ramin Bahrani establishes the streets of Winston-Salem clearly enough, particularly at its squalid edges. Yet the movie, with the help of its realistic base, lifts off into an existential fable: one man's exuberant embrace of life crashes into the other's adamant rejection of it. Why does the old man want to die and the young man so badly need to save him? The power of the fable is derived from Bahrani's unwillingness to solve these mysteries beyond a few hints. Red West has a voice like raw whiskey; Savane's smile and rapid movements light up any space that he inhabits. You will think of them both for days after seeing the movie.—*D.D.* (4/13/09) (In limited release.)

**GOOD CATS**

The bitter ironies of Ying Liang's third feature extend even to the title, a sly double allusion to Deng Xiaoping and Chairman Mao, whose dead hands are shown to weigh heavily on the soul of modern China. Depicting the country's new bourgeoisie with a poised, cold camera style, Ying uses the story of a vast real-estate deal gone awry to liberate, with a barely controlled fury, his country's afflictions—corruption, lovelessness, insanity, rampant violence, and the oppressive forces that prevent their expression. Luo Liang (played by a young man of the same name) is the driver and bagman for a big-time developer, Boss Peng (Peng Deming), who turns to strong-arm tactics when his attempts at bribery fail to clear restive peasants from their land. Meanwhile, Luo Liang doesn't rise in the company, and his wife, the daughter of teachers, grows to despise him. Despite the ugly doings, Ying is incapable of making an ugly shot, and his dynamically unbalanced compositions vibrate with the negative energy unleashed in China's state capitalism as well as with the stifled inner life that censorship and propaganda hold in check. His apocalyptic visions derive from a scrupulous, brave realism, based in quasi-documentary methods; the relentless fall from striving to catastrophe comes off as both a series of phantasmagorical horrors and business as usual. In Mandarin.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; April 26.)

**MONSTERS VS. ALIENS**

A new animated feature from DreamWorks, directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon, in which a prospective bride (voiced by Reese Witherspoon) has her wedding day rudely interrupted by a falling meteorite. The impact leaves her as tall as the Chrysler Building, whereupon she is coöpted by the military and forced to join a squad of outlandish creatures, ranging from the politely inventive to the merely gelatinous, and voiced by Seth Rogen, Will Arnett, and Hugh Laurie. Their task, as you would expect, is to save the planet; this they proceed to do, against the threat of a dome-headed warmonger and his evil clones. There is little here that would not have crossed the minds of sci-fi enthusiasts in the nineteen-fifties, and, for all its digital novelty, the movie has the distinct air of a throwback. Still, it whips along briskly enough (even if the best gags, as ever, are in the trailer) and feels blessedly free of the in-jokes that have clogged up recent DreamWorks projects. Best seen in 3-D, if you can find the right theatre, though the extra dimension continues to seem less of an inspiration than a stunt.—*A.L.* (4/6/09) (In wide release.)

**OBSERVE AND REPORT**

Rancid and unpleasant "black comedy" about a stupid mall security guard (Seth Rogen) who has delusions of grandeur. It's the kind of movie in which everyone but the hero and a chaste innocent (Collette Wolfe) turns out to be rotten and corrupt, and the director keeps scoring off the hapless characters, as if nastiness were some new form of hip. It doesn't work: the jokes are just sour, the violence is miserably staged, and the actors, including Anna Faris, Ray Liotta, Michael Peña, and Celia Weston, get trashed. The plot is devoted to a chubby middle-aged flasher who terrorizes the mall. The movie's audience gets treated in much the same way as the flasher's victims. Written and directed by Jody Hill (a co-creator of the TV series "Eastbound & Down").—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

**PARIS 36**

In 1936, at the time of the Popular Front government of Léon Blum, a group of music-hall stagehands and performers (some talented, some not) occupy a defunct old theatre, the Chansonia, and try to run it themselves. Christophe Barratier's movie suffers from what can only be called creeping Baz Luhrmannism—a tendency to broaden and exaggerate everything to the point of nonsense. In this case, exaggeration is joined to a peculiar sentimentality: "Paris 36" is not so much a left-wing film as a film nostalgic for leftism. The characters are conceived according to the clichés of 1936. There is the brawling but good-hearted Communist stagehand (Clovis Cornillac) who struggles to keep the beautiful young chansonnier (Nora Arnezeder) from the disgusting embrace of a local landlord and crime boss. Surprise!—the crime boss turns out to be a prominent French Fascist. (Those were the days.) Some of the faded music-hall numbers are borderline entertaining; others are just awful—and are supposed to be awful, which makes you wonder why they are worth reviving. With Gérard Jugnot as Pigoil, the cuckolded stage manager and heart and soul of the theatre, an actor with a passing resemblance to Raimu, who played such salt-of-the-earth roles in the thirties. In French.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

**17 AGAIN**

Wasn't once enough? Mike O'Donnell (Matthew Perry), an ironic, self-hating failed father and husband, is transported by an angel back to his seventeen-year-old self, in the person of the brazenly self-confident Zac Efron. But he's not his seventeen-year-old self in the past; it's still the present, and no one seems to notice Perry's absence or the resemblance of this smirking young man to the teen-age version of Perry. There are some embarrassing scenes in which Efron comes on to Perry's grownup wife (Leslie Mann), and still more embarrassing scenes in which their daughter comes on to him. The fantasy is mostly whimsical and arbitrary. Efron's self-assurance as a performer is the main thing the movie has going for it. Directed by Burr Steers; written by Jason Filardi.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

**SUGAR**

There is, certainly, a great movie to be made about a young baseball player from the islands or South America who enters an American-run baseball academy, gets a tryout with a minor-league franchise, suffers the cultural dislocations of American wealth and strangeness, and then, on the verge of success, hits a rock somewhere and capsizes before he can get to the majors. This film, alas, is no more than the template for such a movie. The writer-director team of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck want to overturn the usual triumphalist sports narrative, but the elements of their counter-narrative are sketched in without any particular conviction or strength. Algenis Perez Soto, as Miguel, the handsome and talented young Dominican pitcher, looks the part, but Miguel suffers nothing more than routine difficulties and setbacks. His pulling away from baseball is not determined by anything we see on-screen, and it feels like a misplaced cultural judgment—American capitalism, or something, did him in. Or are the filmmakers suggesting that Miguel is too hampered by guilt or vanity to succeed? Their message—that a good life can be had outside baseball—comes off as a dim and high-minded consolation prize. This is a tragic sports movie that shies away from every element of tragedy.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

**TREELESS MOUNTAIN**

So Yong Kim's second feature, a well-meaning yet underimagined glimpse at the lives of two troubled South Korean girls—Jin (Hee-yeon Kim), a bright young primary-school student, and her little sister, Bin (Song-hee Kim)—stays on the surface of their problems as it presses viewers' compassion buttons. Their caring yet distressed mother goes off in search of her estranged husband and parks the girls with their aunt (Mi-hyang Kim), a crude alcoholic who is neither tender nor attentive and leaves them largely to their own devices. It's hard not to be charmed by the poised young stars, despite the weakness of So Yong Kim's writing and direction. The girls' loneliness, brave efforts at self-reliance, and disappointments are distilled into scenes that push the plot along with a mechanical bluntness; every detail fits puzzle-like into a story that the prettified cinematography disguises as loosely constructed; and moony close-ups take the place of insight into character. The thinness of dialogue, absence of whimsy, and lack of context turn these real girls into symbols; the sympathy they arouse is vague and generic. In Korean.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

**TYSON**

After seeing this fascinating James Toback documentary about Mike Tyson, one can never again think of the fighter as a simpleminded thug. He's a very complex-minded thug indeed, full of contradictions, which he articulates with considerable detail and feeling. The man we see is sad and vulnerable and ferocious all at once—frightened as a virtually parentless boy in Brooklyn who was robbed by neighborhood kids, then remorseless as a baby gangster robbing drug dealers. In detention in upstate New York, he was steered into boxing and wound up in the hands of the great trainer Cus D'Amato, who took him in, fathered him, and got him to concentrate his strength and rage into a relentless attack in which speed—a hail of punches—drives through his opponents' defenses. The rest is bravado, boasting, good and bad times with many women and hangers-on, enormous earnings (most of them blown), and wrenching self-criticism and self-abnegation. Toback doesn't press Tyson on the rape conviction that sent him to prison for three years. (Tyson claims he was innocent.) He lets Tyson speak at great length, and we are free to judge the self-mythologizing, which, however overblown, cannot blur the genuinely tragic story of an ignorant street kid's precipitous rise and disastrous fall.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

**VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR**

The opulent life style and fabulous haute-couture fashions of the great designer Valentino are presented in all their splendor in this documentary by Matt Tyrnauer. The film covers Valentino's final two years at work before his retirement and the grand forty-fifth-anniversary party, in 2007, celebrating his fashions. The film isn't a biography; Tyrnauer simply follows the designer around and captures the moments. And, between the life beyond luxury (the Roman villa, the French château, the yacht, the skiing in Gstaad) and the workers in his showroom (including his prickly genius seamstress and her assistants, who dress in white when handling the beautiful fabrics), there's plenty to choose from. But the film's main focus is Valentino's forty-five years with his business and life partner, Giancarlo Giammetti, whose attentiveness and devotion to the designer are sincerely moving. It's a stirring relationship, and Tyrnauer's film catches what genuinely feels like the end of an era. By the time we get to the party, for which the Colosseum is bathed in blue light as a backdrop for wire-dancing acrobats dressed in Valentino red, the Felliniesque-ness of it all can bring tears to our eyes.—*Bruce Diones* (Film Forum.)

**VIRIDIANA**

In Luis Buñuel's perverse comedy from 1961, the title character, a young blond nun (Silvia Pinal, a prototype for Catherine Deneuve), comes to ruin through the double bind of others' evil plans and her own good works. Taken from a convent one last time to visit a wealthy uncle, a pious lecher (Fernando Rey), she is snared in his lascivious scheme to install her in the place of her late aunt—who died in his arms on their wedding day. As penitence, she converts his estate to a shelter for beggars, exposing herself to a feral carnality no less destructive than his insidious kind. As ever with Buñuel, religion and lust are one (Bach and rock inflame desire equally, and a habit is as arousing as a bustier), and the devil is in the details: the bare feet of a girl jumping rope, a burning crown of thorns, and a pocketknife concealed in a cross join with the anarchic doings to convey his sardonic world view. In Spanish.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; April 24-30.)

## *Also Playing*

**FAST & FURIOUS:** In wide release. **HANNAH MONTANA THE MOVIE:** In wide release. **I LOVE YOU, MAN:** In wide release. **KNOWING:** In wide release.

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## REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.*

**ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES**

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Shirley Clarke. April 22 at 7 and April 28 at 9: Short-film Program 1, including "Brussels Loops" (1957). ♦ April 22 at 8:30 and April 25 at 7: "The Cool World" (†). ♦ April 23 at 7 and April 25 at 9:15: "The Connection" (1962). ♦ April 23 at 9:15 and April 27 at 7: "Rome Burns—A Portrait of Shirley Clarke" (1970, Noël Burch and André S. Labarthe). ♦ April 24 at 7 and April 27 at 8:30: "Portrait of Jason" (1967). ♦ April 24 at 9:15 and April 26 at 7: "Ornette: Made in America" (1985). ♦ April 25 at 5:30: Short-film Program 2: experimental dance films, collected as "Four Journeys Into Mystic Time" (1979). ♦ April 26 at 5:30: Short-film Program 3, including "Savage/Love" (1981). ♦ April 26 at 9 and April 28 at 7: Short-film Program 4, including "Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel with the World" (1963). ♦ The films of Thomas Imbach. April 24 at 7:15: "Well Done" (1994). ♦ April 24 at 9: "Happiness Is a Warm Gun" (2001). ♦ April 25 at 6:30: "Lenz" (2006). ♦ April 25 at 8:45: "I Was a Swiss Banker" (2006). ♦ April 26 at 6:30: "Restlessness" (1991). ♦ April 26 at 8:30: "Ghetto" (1997).

**BAM ROSE CINEMAS**

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Winners of the Prix Louis Delluc." All films are in French. April 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1950, Robert Bresson). The 6:50 screening will followed by a discussion with the film critic Elliott Stein. ♦ April 24 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday" (1953, Jacques Tati). ♦ April 25 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Claire's Knee" (1970, Eric Rohmer). ♦ April 26 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Secret of the Grain" (2008, Abdel Kechiche). ♦ April 27 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Farewell, Home Sweet Home" (1999, Otar Iosseliani). ♦ April 28 at 7: "Lady Chatterley" (2006, Pascale Ferran).

**FILM FORUM**

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. April 22-23 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Léon Morin, Priest" (1961, Jean-Pierre Melville; in French). ♦ April 24-30 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Viridiana" (†).

**FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER**

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Through April 30: The films of Satyajit Ray. All films are in Bengali. April 22 at 1 and April 25 at 9: "Mahanagar" ("The Big City") (1963). ♦ April 22 at 3:30: "The Coward and the Holy Man" (1965). ♦ April 22 at 9: "The Expedition" (1962). ♦ April 23 at 6:45 and April 27 at 4: "The Hero" (1966). ♦ April 23 at 9:10: "The Zoo" (1967). ♦ April 26 at 4 and April 27 at 6:30: "Days and Nights in the Forest" (1970). ♦ April 27 at 8:45 and April 28 at 1:45: "The Adversary" (1971). ♦ April 28 at 4 and 9: "Company Limited" (1971). ♦ "On the Edge: New Independent Cinema from China 2009." Except where noted, all films are in Mandarin. April 24 at 6:45: "Chongqing" (2008, Zhang Lü). ♦ April 24 at 9: "The Other Half" (2006, Ying Liang). ♦ April 25 at 1:30: "Er Dong" (2008, Yang Jin). ♦ April 25 at 4:30: "Ma Wu Jia" (2007, Zhao Ye). ♦ April 25 at 6:45: "Little Moth" (2007, Peng Tao). ♦ April 26 at 6:20: "Good Cats" (†). ♦ April 26 at 8:45: "Iri" (2008, Zhang Lü; in Korean).

**FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE**

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Cinema According to Jackie Raynal." All films are in French. April 28 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Hotel New York" (1984). The 4 P.M. screening will include the U.S. première of "Gougnette" (2009), and the 7:30 screening will include a filmed interview with Eric Rohmer by Raynal.

**IFC CENTER**

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." April 24-25: "Eraserhead" (1977, David Lynch). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. April 28 at 8: "The Way We Get By" (2008, Aron Gaudet).

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through May 1: The films of Mike Nichols. April 22 at 4:30 and April 23 at 8: "The Birdcage" (†). ♦ April 22 at 8: "Heartburn" (1986). ♦ April 23-24 at 4:30: "Closer" (2004). ♦ April 24 at 8: "Angels in America, Part 1" (2003). ♦ April 25 at 2 and April 26 at 5:30: "Working Girl" (1988). ♦ April 25 at 5 and April 27 at 4:30: "Wit" (2003). ♦ April 25 at 8: "Angels in America, Part 2" (2003). ♦ April 26 at 2:30: "The Fortune" (1975). ♦ April 27 at 8: "Catch-22" (1970). ♦ "Kino! At Thirty," films from Germany. All films are in German. April 23 at 4 and April 25 at 8:30: "Reverse Shot—Rebellion of the Filmmakers" (2008, Laurens Straub and Dominik Wessely). ♦ April 24 at 4 and April 26 at 4:30: "Sisters; or, The Balance of Happiness" (1979, Margarethe von Trotta). ♦ April 24 at 7 and April 26 at 2: "The Invention of Currywurst" (2008, Ulla Wagner). ♦ April 25 at 1:30: "The Merchant of Four Seasons" (1971, Rainer Werner Fassbinder). ♦ April 25 at 4 and April 26 at 6:30: "Stroszek" (1977, Werner Herzog).

**YIVO**
15 W. 16th St. (212-246-6080)—Through April 28: "Picturing the Shoah: Representations of the Holocaust in Cinema." April 26 at 7: "Bent" (1997, Sean Mathias). ♦ April 28 at 7: "Lili Marleen" (1981, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German), followed by a discussion with the critic Kent Jones.

## READINGS AND TALKS

**"READINGS ON THE FOURTH FLOOR"**
The novelist Jonathan Safran Foer and the memoirist Saïd Sayrafiezadeh read from their work. (P.S. 107, 1301 Eighth Ave., between 13th and 14th Sts., Brooklyn. For more information, visit www.ps107.org. April 22 at 7:30.)

**SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE POETRY FESTIVAL**
More than forty poets, including Cynthia Cruz, Linda Gregg, Mark Doty, C. K. Williams, Rita Dove, Jorie Graham, and Mary Ruefle, read from their work during this weekend-long gathering just outside the city. (For more information, visit www.slc.edu/poetry-festival. April 24-26.)

**KGB BAR**
85 E. 4th St. (212-505-3360)—The poets George Green and Billy Collins read from their work. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. April 27 at 7:30.)

**QUEENS COLLEGE**
The writers Norman Manea, Greil Marcus, Joyce Carol Oates, and Norman Rush join Philip Roth for a fiftieth-anniversary celebration of Roth's career. (LeFrak Concert Hall, the Music Building, Flushing. For more information, visit www.qc.edu/readings. April 28 at 7.)

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

**GIORGIO BASSANI CELEBRATION**
Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000), the author of "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis," was known for his unsparing analysis of society in his native city of Ferrara. An exhibition at the Italian Cultural Institute (686 Park Ave.) brings together paintings by artists connected to Bassani and his world—among them Giorgio Morandi, Filippo de Pisis, and Francis Bacon—along with manuscripts and letters. On April 22, the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò (24 W. 12th St.), which is the site of a second exhibition of documents and photographs associated with the author, will hold two roundtable discussions of Bassani's work, featuring the scholars Nancy Harrowitz (of Boston University) and Sergio Parussa (Wesley College) and Bassani's daughter, Paola Bassani. Two films based on Bassani's novels will be shown at the Centro Primo Levi (15 W. 16th St.): "The Gold-Rimmed Glasses," on May 4, and "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis," on May 5. (Both exhibitions run through May 7. For more information, visit www.primolevicenter.org.)

**AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES**
Sumptuous colors and materials, an eye for theatrical effect, and an opulent lyricism: these are some of the qualities that characterize the lots in this week's auctions of Russian art. Take Nicholas Roerich's rich blue-green shadows in the painting "Monhegan, Maine (Hope)," on offer at **Sotheby's**, so saturated and luminous one can almost feel their resonance. The painting is one of several by Roerich and his son Svetoslav to be auctioned in the first of two sessions of Russian art on April 22; the second is devoted to icons, decorative objects, and Fabergé items, redolent of a pre-revolutionary world of excess and aristocratic charm. The sale is followed by one, no less lavish, of jewels (April 23) and another of nineteenth-century European and Orientalist art (April 24), with the usual glistening Parisian streetscapes, Venetian views, and bucolic scenes. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Two days after a spectacular sale of diamonds and other jewelry on April 22, **Christie's** holds its own Russian auction on April 24, which, like the one at Sotheby's, includes a series of works by Nicholas and Svetoslav Roerich. One of the most imposing is a portrait by Svetoslav of his father, wearing a Tibetan robe and looking very much like a stern but benevolent emperor. The post-Impressionist Natalia Goncharova, one of the artistic lights of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, is represented by a layered still-life in whites and shades of gray ("The Lilacs"). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips** takes a curatorial approach in its "Saturday @ Phillips" auction (April 25), which, this time around, focusses on "urban art" of the last twenty-five years, such as a friendly ink drawing on skateboard by Keith Haring and a spray-paint canvas ("Diptych: Looking In, Looking Out") by the graffiti artist Crash (a.k.a. John Matos). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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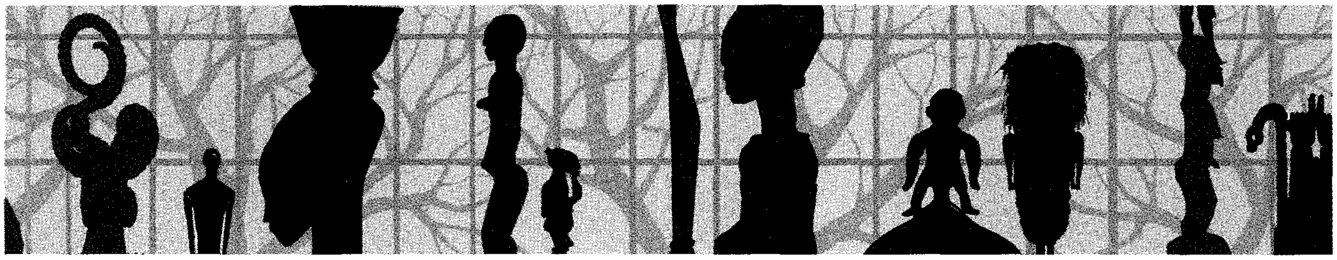
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



*African and Oceanic art from the Barbier-Mueller Museum, at the Met.*

YVETTA FEDOROVA

## ON THE HORIZON

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## MOVIES
### BETTER THAN NEVER
*April 30–May 21*

Directors who don't die young can go on forever—take Manoel de Oliveira, who is still working at the age of a hundred. BAM's series "The Late Film" features "A Talking Picture," which he made in 2003, as well as such other twilight masterworks as John Ford's last film, "7 Women," Alfred Hitchcock's "Marnie," and Eric Rohmer's "Autumn Tale" (presented by Jonathan Baumbach). (718-636-4100.)

## NIGHT LIFE
### SOFT SOUNDS
*May 3 and 7*

Vetiver is a San Franciscan group that comes out of the freak-folk movement, but it tends to favor a more traditional approach. It has a winsome new release of tender originals, "Tight Knit," and shows at the Bowery Ballroom, in Manhattan, and the Bell House, in Brooklyn. (www.myspace.com/vetiverse.)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC
### MAHLER MOMENT
*May 6–17*

A visit from Daniel Barenboim's Staatskapelle Berlin—a great orchestra with a warmly burnished Old World sound—is always welcome, but their residency at Carnegie Hall is a feast: all nine of Mahler's symphonies, plus a concert of chamber music by Elliott Carter. (212-247-7800.)

## ABOVE AND BEYOND
### LINCOLN CENTER TALE
*May 6–23*

StoryCorps, the nonprofit project documenting everyday American history, brings its mobile recording studio to Lincoln Center to help the arts complex celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. (www.storycorps.org.)

## ART
### OCEANS AWAY
*June 2–Sept. 27*

In the nineteen-twenties, the Swiss businessman Josef Mueller, already a patron of Picasso, Matisse, and Cézanne, began collecting African and Oceanic art, now housed in Geneva's Barbier-Mueller Museum. More than thirty objects from the collection, including Congolese masks and a rare wooden sculpture from Easter Island, will go on view at the Met. (212-535-7710.)

ry reminds us that, at every moment of economic
upheaval and transformation, this nation
as responded with bold action and big ideas.”

—President Barack Obama, February 24, 2009

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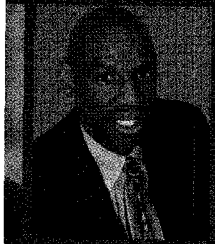

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# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

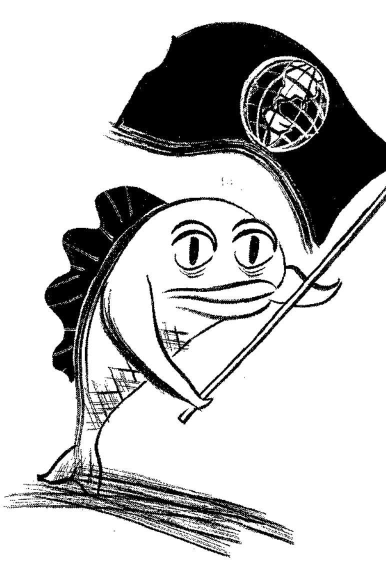
## COMMENT
## IN THE AIR

The first celebration of Earth Day, on April 22, 1970, was a raucously exuberant affair. In New York, Fifth Avenue was closed to traffic. People picnicked on the sidewalk; dead fish were dragged through midtown; and Governor Nelson Rockefeller rode a bicycle across Prospect Park. Students in Richmond, Virginia, handed out bags of dirt (to represent the "good earth"); demonstrators in Washington poured oil onto the sidewalk in front of the Interior Department (to protest recent oil spills); and in Bloomington, Indiana, women dressed as witches threw birth-control pills into the crowd (no one was quite sure why). All told, some twenty million Americans took part—far more than the man who thought up the occasion, Senator Gaylord Nelson, Democrat of Wisconsin, had expected. "That was the remarkable thing about Earth Day," Nelson later said. "It organized itself."

Among those who seemed unmoved was President Richard Nixon. He avoided the festivities and made no public comment on them. (One of his aides, John Whitaker, later acknowledged that the Administration had been "totally unprepared" for the wave of environmental activism "that was about to engulf us.") Nevertheless, even Nixon seems to have got the message. Three months afterward, he created the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and five months after that he signed the Clean Air Act. The Clean Water Act, the Pesticide Control Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act all became law by the end of 1974.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Since the mid-nineteen-seventies, the nation's environmental agenda—to the extent that it has had one—has consisted mainly of trying to defend these early achievements. This is all the more notable because of what has happened in the intervening years. At the time of the first Earth Day, the term "global warming" was barely in circulation—the relatively small group of scientists concerned about the consequences of rising $CO_2$ levels used the phrase "inadvertent climate modification"—and actual warming had yet to be clearly detected. Today, of course, there are thousands of scientists studying global warming, and new effects are constantly being observed. Just a few weeks ago, researchers reported that Antarctica's Wilkins Ice Shelf had "begun to collapse because of rapid climate change." The ice shelf was larger than the state of Connecticut; it now seems destined to disappear. "We've come to the Wilkins Ice Shelf to see its final death throes," a glaciologist with the British Antarctic Survey, who made a farewell trip there, told Reuters.



To do something meaningful about global warming will require legislation even more far-reaching than the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, and recently there have been encouraging signs that Congress and the White House understand this. Late last year, Henry Waxman, of California, an outspoken advocate of action on climate change, wrested control of the House's Energy and Commerce Committee from John Dingell, of Michigan, an outspoken advocate of delay. A few weeks ago, Waxman introduced a comprehensive energy bill, which, while flawed, at least represents a starting point. President Barack Obama, for his part, has been clear about the urgency of the problem; shortly after taking office, he observed that global warming, "if left unchecked," could result in "irreversible catastrophe." To guide him, he has assembled some of the most knowledgeable and thoughtful people in the nation. What has been called Obama's "green dream team" includes Energy Secretary Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize winner; the White House science adviser, John Holdren, a physicist on leave from Harvard; and the NOAA administrator, Jane Lubchenco, a highly regarded marine ecologist. In a move that has been widely interpreted as a prod to Congress, the E.P.A. last week designated carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases as pollutants. This is an important step forward, which the Bush Administration spent two years and millions of dollars of taxpayer money dithering about. The designation initiates the regulation of $CO_2$ under the Clean Air Act, a process that could eventually affect most major industries in the United States.

Still, there are plenty of reasons to wonder whether serious steps to reduce carbon emissions will be taken this year or, indeed, ever. Regulating $CO_2$ using existing laws will be a laborious, and potentially litigious, exercise. Meanwhile, the Administration has been strangely passive about trying to shape climate legislation—one reason that the Waxman bill is likely to be further watered down. Then, there's the question of whether even an inadequate bill has the votes to pass.

Three and a half decades ago, when the nation's key environmental laws were approved, politicians were responding to the mood of the country. Today, the situation is largely reversed. Polls show that voters regard the environment in general, and climate change in particular, as, at best, middling concerns. In a recent survey, the Pew Research Center asked Americans about their priorities for Congress and the new President. "Dealing with global warming" ranked at the bottom of a list of twenty choices, far below "strengthening the nation's economy" and "reducing health-care costs," and even below dealing with unspecified "global trade issues." The recession seems to have dampened the nation's enthusiasm for any measure that could affect—or, perhaps just as important, be portrayed as affecting—people's pocketbooks. Last month, when Gallup asked Americans whether "protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth," only forty-two per cent said yes. This was the lowest proportion in the twenty-five years since the firm started asking the question. Results like these do not make action on climate change any less imperative. But—especially since opponents can be counted on to spend tens of millions of dollars on lobbying—they do make it that much less likely.

This week, when Earth Day turns thirty-nine, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation will plant trees. The Interior Department will host a fair in Washington's Rawlins Park, and in Bloomington volunteers will teach sixth graders about karsts and creeks. As perhaps befits a middle-aged celebration, these are all eminently reasonable activities. But Earth Day has lost its edge and, with that, the sense that a different world is possible. Even more than in 1970, what's needed now is an outpouring that organizes itself—with millions of people and, for good measure, some stinky dead fish in the streets.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

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## FIRSTS
## YANKEES FOR SALE

An hour before Yogi Berra threw out the inaugural pitch at the new Yankee Stadium last Thursday afternoon, a ten-piece band welcomed fans to a stretch of gleaming white concrete identified as Babe Ruth Plaza with a rendition of Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline." Bad omen. Did someone forget to tell them that this is the unofficial theme song of the Boston Red Sox? The Yankees' eventual crushing defeat, after a seventh-inning collapse, seemed almost like a referendum from on high: a moral smiting of the fools who spent one and a half billion dollars to build a replica of the world's most famous ballpark across the street from the perfectly serviceable real thing, and then stuffed it with Mohegan Sun Sports Bars and Jim Beam Suite Lounges, on the eve of the steepest recession in decades. "Nothing like people in twenty-six-hundred-dollar seats scrambling for a five-dollar ball," one man grumbled, after a foul fly landed behind the Yankees' dugout. (The average ticket price is up seventy-six per cent.) "Welcome to the House the Bondholders Built," another said. "Or the House the TARP built," a third added.

But from the perspective of one fan in the press box, where the seats are free, the new Stadium experience did offer some unexpected pleasures, such as the running transcript, on a couple of the outfield scoreboards, of the new P.A. announcer's remarks. (Bob Sheppard, the ninety-eight-year-old mainstay, has fallen ill with a bronchial infection.) Baseball has long been a game of records, and the transcription service introduced a new level of historical certitude, for instance, to the crowd reactions during the pre-game introductions. For the Indians' Carl Pavano, a former and unloved Yankee, there was this: "No. 44, Carl Pavano [crowd boos]." On the home team's side, meanwhile, the digital display provided a clear delineation between the stars and the also-rans: "No. 42, Mariano Rivera [cheers and applause] . . . No. 43, Damaso Marte . . . No. 46, Andy Pettitte [cheers and applause]." Poor Marte. He would go on to yield six runs in one inning of relief work, confirming the fans' suspicions, and now, it appears, we will have an official record of when, if ever, he earns his pinstripes in the public's estimation.

For an inning or so, the scoreboards even ran transcripts of the televised broadcast, so that everyone sitting in the sun was included in the relentless memorializing of Stadium "firsts" for the stay-at-home crowd. ("That's a broken bat," the broadcaster Michael Kay apparently said after Johnny Damon broke his bat. "First one at the Stadium.") Then the text gave way to a Modell's ad, and the fan, sensing doom, decided to vacate his seat for a tour of the concessions, intent on finding the best bargain while the game was still close and the lines still short. As expected, nothing was cheap (Philly cheesesteak, $10.75; citrus slaw, $6), but the menu boards helpfully listed the number of calories in each item, and a winner emerged in the calories-per-dollar statistic: Moe's Billy Barou Nachos, which can be found on the concourse of the upper deck. At nine dollars and 1,410 calories, they provide triple the value of a standard ballpark frank ($6 and 297 calories). Dieters, don't be fooled by the Miller Lite. If you buy it in the souvenir-cup size ($10), you'll consume more calories for your money than you would by drinking Peroni ($8.50).

Who knew that the Yankees had an

official artist? At field level, there is a gallery featuring works by the German-born Pop artist Peter Max, and some of them even involve baseball players. But by the top of the seventh, with the Indians rallying, the few window-shoppers could be forgiven for overlooking the images of Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle and, instead, hovering in front of "Flag with Heart, Version IX." It can be had for $7,850, or a little less than the cost of four front-row seats.

A couple of cardiologists from St. Vincent's Hospital abandoned the game at the seventh-inning stretch, after the Indians had built a nine-run lead, and watched the remainder at Ball Park Lanes, a bowling alley on River Avenue that has doubled as a bag-check since the attacks of September 11th. The lanes were situated conveniently for the old Stadium's bleachers entrance, and their owner, John Gianos, who worries that the new Stadium will kill business, rewarded the cardiologists' loyalty with free Heinekens (calories per dollar: infinite).

Back at the Stadium, when the game had finished, George Steinbrenner was wheeled out in a golf cart as security guards attempted to prevent reporters from catching a glimpse of the fading Boss. Steinbrenner deemed the new Stadium "beautiful," and the players' clubhouse, which is enormous and shaped almost like a baseball, fits the description. Each locker has been equipped with its own computer monitor. Yet relief pitching remains an ancient and elusive art.

—*Ben McGrath*

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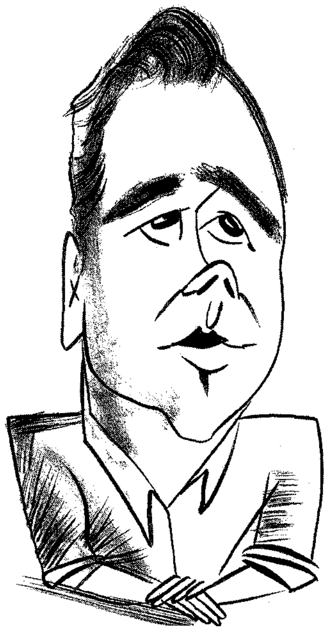
### INK

## THE REAL BRET EASTON ELLIS

"The Informers," an ensemble film set in nineteen-eighties L.A.—Ray-Bans, chopper soundtrack, drugs, rock, vodka in the tub, spiritual alienation rendered as standing on the sidelines of a foursome, clothed—maintains a certain fidelity to that world as it is witnessed by Bret Easton Ellis, the post-modern pastiche author who wrote the short stories on which the film was based. Ellis wrote the stories during long winter breaks from Bennington College, while back home in his childhood bedroom in Sherman Oaks. They came out as a book in 1994, after his best-known novels, "Less Than Zero" and "American Psycho," had already been published; he wrote the screenplay with Nicholas Jarecki several years ago, and both writers are credited as executive producers on the film.



*Bret Easton Ellis*

"Canter's represents a place where one would go out to eat at four in the morning after being at clubs," Ellis said the other day, referring to the all-night delicatessen on Fairfax where the nervous television anchorwoman played by Winona Ryder goes for a pack of cigarettes and a garden salad. "It was one of the very few places open where you could get a sandwich and hang out." Spago, painstakingly re-created, down to the white wire-basket chairs, for an awkward family-dinner scene (with Billy Bob Thornton as the cheating, narcissistic studio-executive dad and Kim Basinger as the unglued mom), was, Ellis said, "a place my family went to dinner a lot, not to sound too gross." In the film, a debauched rock star has a gig at the Greek, where as a teenager Ellis would go to hear his favorite bands: the Go-Go's, Split Enz, Squeeze. The Ellis family vacationed in Hawaii—the locus of strained recreation for a bullying father (Chris Isaak) and his huffy son (Lou Taylor Pucci). In 1983, the year in which the film is set, Ellis was driving a cherry-red BMW; the next year, he was given his father's hand-me-down Mercedes 450SL. Needless to say, the cars of "The Informers" are German-made.

Ellis, who is forty-five, has reddish-brown hair, a cleft chin, and a soft gaze, was sitting before a computer at a glass-topped desk in a small apartment in West Hollywood, which he bought in 2006, after leaving New York, where he had lived since the late eighties. The few furnishings—a sleek fawn-colored sofa, an ottoman with Lucite legs—came with the unit. Since moving in, he said, he has been working on a sequel to "Less Than Zero," which will come out next spring. The narrator is Clay, the spoiled, cocaine-numbed teen of the first book, twenty-five years down the road, and now a Hollywood screenwriter who, having lived in New York for years, returns to Los Angeles. The novel's opening line, Ellis said, is "They had made a movie about us," an allusion to the film that came out in 1987, with Andrew McCarthy as Clay and Robert Downey, Jr., as his friend Julian. He said that he identifies more deeply with Clay than with the character he named Bret Easton Ellis in his most recent book, "Lunar Park," a palimpsest of Ellis's real life and past fictions. "Clay is probably a more villainous version of me, a mean version of me."

In Los Angeles, Ellis spends a lot of time with his closest high-school friends, the artist's studies for the "Less Than Zero" characters. The rest he keeps track of on Facebook, where he has his own profile—"I got on Facebook to stalk someone," he said—as well as several impersonators, which, being himself something of an identity prankster, he doesn't mind.

What about Twitter? He said he didn't have an account, but, with light encouragement, he decided to establish one. He moved the computer mouse across a stack of *Artforum* magazines—the one personal affectation in the room—and tried to register "BretEastonEllis." The user name was taken—the profile photograph was an old Bret Easton Ellis publicity shot—and so was "bretellis." He settled on "eastonellis," and sent out a message. "This is the real BEE," he wrote, and said aloud, "What should I put, BTW, FYI, OMG?"

Satisfied, Ellis turned from the computer screen and said he had come back to Los Angeles to start over. "I just wanted to not be Bret Easton Ellis, whatever this persona was," he said. "I was tired of going to book parties, the gossip, the same faces. L.A. seemed like an opportunity to reinvent myself. I'm alone a lot. It makes you look at yourself. It goes beyond narcissism—it goes to the heart of who you really are. And then you become who you really are." He smiled knowingly. "I'm the real BEE now."

—*Dana Goodyear*

### DEPT. OF PUBLIC MEN

## EXIT LAWYERS

One recent evening, Philip Howard appeared before an audience at the New-York Historical Society, on Central Park West, where Herman Melville once lectured on the South Sea Islands, and James Fenimore Cooper discussed the Battle of Plattsburgh Bay, to talk about his new book, "Life Without Lawyers," with Sir Harold Evans, the author and the former president of Random House. In the crowd was a mixture of civil libertarians, Howard relatives (including Alexandra Schlesinger, Arthur's widow, who is Howard's wife's first cousin), students from John Jay College, who were reading Howard's 1994 best-seller, "The Death of Common Sense," and, yes, lawyers.

"I could sue you tonight for humiliating me," Evans noted at the outset, "by displaying greater intelligence than I have!"

"Truth is a defense," Howard replied.

"That's defamation straightaway!" Evans declared.

Howard, who is sixty, sat balanced lightly on the edge of his chair (he is a longtime yogi), his long legs coiled under him, looking poised for action. He is tall and slim, and his silver-haired, senatorial head was inclined slightly, in that agreeable Jimmy Stewart way. Wearing a perfectly knotted tie that some say he sleeps in, a dark-navy suit, black shoes, and an elegant but not fancy watch, he looked every inch the establishmentarian. But actually he is the son of a Presbyterian minister from rural Kentucky and was plucked from humble circumstances after J.F.K. "discovered Appalachia," as he put it, in 1962. He was sent on a scholarship to the Taft School, "which was like being sent to Mars," and from there won a scholarship to Yale, where "life really began." After moving to Manhattan, he married into a prominent New York family (the Cushings), began his career as a corporate lawyer (today, he is a partner at the firm of Covington & Burling), and devoted himself to preserving urban landmarks and sharing his good fortune with those less fortunate than he. For the past ten years, he has been the chairman of the Municipal Art Society, where he has earned a reputation as a man who knows how to get things done.

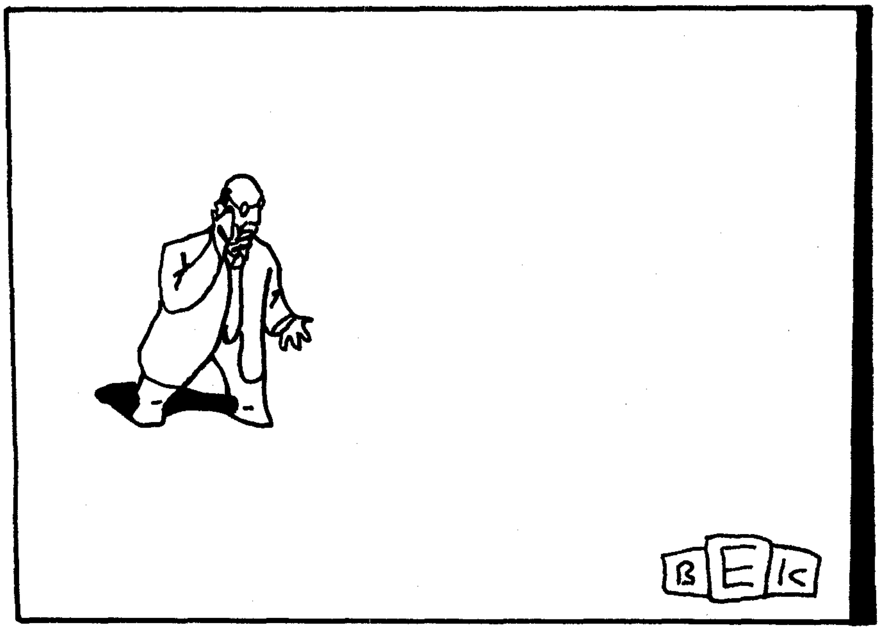
After Evans set the tone by informing audience members of all the things they were not allowed to do during the next hour—"no spitting, no talking, no cell phones, no frowning, no smiling (except when a joke is intended), no coughing, no touching"—Howard laid out the gist of his book's argument. Americans face a crisis of authority, one brought on not by too few rules but by too many. These rules, he suggested, are a by-product of the "rights revolution," which began in the sixties and has led to the demise of what he called "functioning authority structures." We now live in a society where "teachers, doctors, camp counselors, and government officials can't do their jobs properly," because "any time someone gets angry they can sue." The result is chaos—frivolity in the courts and paralysis in government.

He talked about "lawyers who hang out at the intersection of tragedy and greed" and mentioned the recent case of a Washington, D.C., judge who sued a dry cleaner for fifty-four million dollars for losing a pair of pants.

"What!" Evans exclaimed.

Howard is delighted by President Obama's call for a "new era of personal responsibility," and says of the President (a law-school graduate, of course), "He is figuring out how to release the energy and creativity of American people by encouraging accountability." But, for those efforts to succeed, Howard thinks we need to overcome "the tyranny of the angry man" shouting, "No, you can't!"

In the course of researching his book, Howard asked hundreds of people the same question: "How do you feel?" A lot of them answered that they felt constricted by bureaucracy. Teachers told him that they spent half the time in the classroom keeping order, because their authority was undermined by students' "rights." "We live in a society in which a teacher is afraid to discipline an eighth grader for fear of infringing his rights!" he said.



*"I lost everything—the business, the house, the landscape."*

At one point, Evans, peering at the audience, noted, "There must be a lawyer or two in the audience?" About thirty hands bashfully went up.

"The number of lawyers in the workforce has doubled," Howard said.

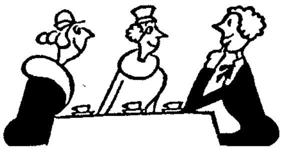
"Should we make it difficult for lawyers to graduate?" Evans asked. (Howard didn't see how that was possible.) "Another thing you could do is cut legal fees." Cheers and groans, in equal number, mingled.

Howard broached another of his bêtes noires: the removal of seesaws and other equipment from New York City's parks, for liability reasons. "Seesaws are quite important, because they teach you to distrust people," he said, and added, "I learned to distrust my brothers at a very early age."

The good news is that everything is about to change. Howard, quickly limning two centuries of American history, pointed out that large social changes occur every forty years, and we are due for one right now. Someone from the audience asked, referring to his plan to reform society, "How optimistic can we be?" Howard smiled. "With your help," he replied, and the old building seemed to whisper, *Yes, we can.*

—*John Seabrook*

## DEPT. OF COMMUNICATION
## MOTHER LODE



Hey, Mom,

What's going on? You know how my friends and I always get a kick out of the e-mails and texts that our moms send us? Like, after the big Hillary debate, when you wrote, "2 quote Bill, she's a scumbag!" or the time Mrs. Williams thought that "Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo" was a foreign film? Last year, Jessica Grose, who works at *Slate*, forwarded an e-mail from her mom to her friend Doree Shafrir, a reporter at the *Observer*. It was about Ed Koch, whom Jessica's mom had apparently seen one time on a plane. I think the e-mail even included the phrase "New York's eunuch mayor"! Anyway, Doree loved it, so she sent Jessica an e-mail that *her* mom had written about how they had said on the red carpet before the Oscars that Keri Russell's baby was crying when she left the house. Jessica and Doree decided to start a Web site, Postcards from Yo Momma, where people could send in notes, from mothers to their "moon unit" or their "little blueberries," that were really endearing ("I can't talk; I'm watching the Diana documentary on that Tender Loving Care Channel"), or really bizarre ("Dad uncovered a gerbil skull in the garden. Does anyone want it?"), or just cracked them up ("At Kaufmann's seder we decided that Adir Hu . . . could be a drinking song!"). They've got a book out this month. It's called "Love, Mom: Poignant, Goofy, Brilliant Messages from Home," and it's a repository of mother wit on all the important topics: guys, relatives, Barbara Kingsolver, "American Idol," taco salads. Check out the I.M. conversation one girl sent in:

Me: hey, here's the dress I was telling you about!

Mom: hi Sweetheart, wow! kind of "whochimama" look! I looked on the website but couldn't find it to buy it online. Can you tell me how to get to it?

Me: oh mom, you're funny. do you know that hoochie mama means great big slut?

Mom: Oh, my God!!! no, I thought it meant hot and sexy!

So, O.K., it's not so bad when you call Victoria's Secret "Victoria's Secrets."

Anyway, Jessica's mom, Judith Ebenstein, took the train in from Westchester the other day, and Doree's mom, Roberta Steinberg, came down from Boston, and they all went to lunch at Fred's at Barneys. Roberta is an English teacher—fun, feisty. Everyone else got salads, but she goes, "I don't mean to be a party pooper," and ordered crabcakes and fries. She said that her younger daughter would call her "if her toenail cracked," but that Doree can be hard to get on the phone, so she used to e-mail her a lot. Jessica said that she never talks on the phone with any of her friends. "We always screen," she said, looking over at Judith, a psychiatrist with a cool haircut. "I know you're the only person who will always pick up!"

"Judith and I also both have A.O.L. addresses, so that's pretty embarrassing," Roberta said.

Judith said to Jessica, "You'll be happy to know I never go on there except to check e-mail."

A few weeks ago, Doree and Jessica had a book party, and a bunch of the moms came to town. Roberta said that it was like a high-school-yearbook signing, with people running around saying, "I'm the kosher-soup mom!" or "I'm the cat-poop one!" Since the site and the book—they're like "Kids Say the Darnedest Things," in reverse—Roberta and Judith have become more cautious about e-mailing. Roberta said, "Even if it's cute or funny, if it's a forward Doree goes ballistic. I've stopped saying, 'Did you see So-and-So in the New York *Times* wedding section?' "

"Jessica's very hard to annoy," Judith said.

"Well, you do sometimes preface your e-mails by saying, 'You know I never ask you to do anything, but . . .' " Jessica said.

When the food came, Roberta insisted that everybody take a fry. Then she told some guy at the next table that he had stuff on his shoes.

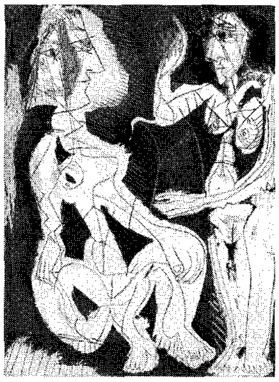
Judith's not a Freudian, but she thinks that Freud got some things right, like that mothers have different relationships with their daughters than with their sons. She said, "As my own mother always says, children are at the center of parents' lives, and parents are on the periphery. We write e-mails that have to be perceived as lame, because independence has to be preserved."

Jessica was like, "That's such a shrink answer!"

Mom, whatever you do, please don't forward this story to everyone in the family. Wish you could have been there. Love you!

—*Lauren Collins*

SWANN



Pablo Picasso, *Sable Mouvant* by Pierre Reverdy, illustrated with 10 aquatints, Paris, 1966. Estimate $8,000 to $12,000.

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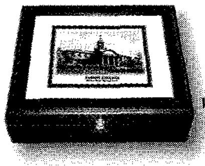

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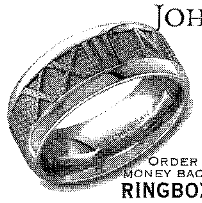

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### ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

# THE BELLS

*How Harvard helped preserve a Russian legacy.*

BY ELIF BATUMAN

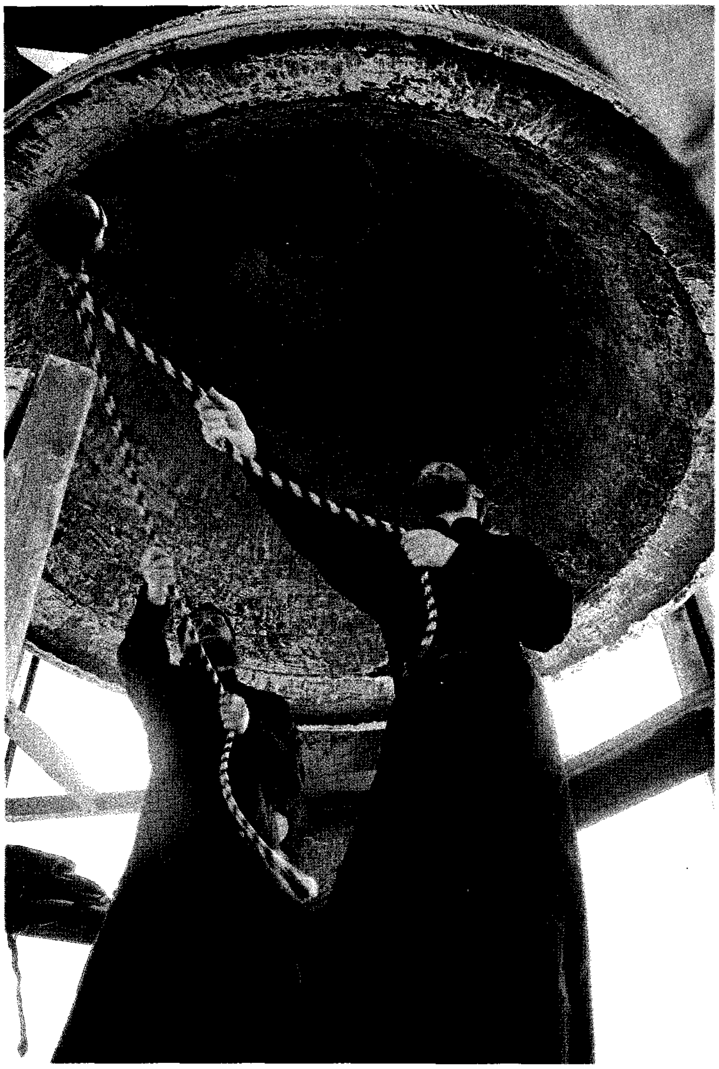
Father Roman is the head bell ringer at the Danilov Monastery, the working residence of the Moscow Patriarch and the seat of the Holy Synod. But the first time he rang the monastery's original bells was in 2003, at Harvard's Lowell House, where they had hung since the early years of Stalin's Terror, when bell ringing was banned throughout Soviet Russia. I met Father Roman this past June, when he returned to Harvard to help commemorate the bells' repatriation. He was presented to me rather abruptly by one of the Lowell House masters. "This is Father Roman," she announced, and, turning, I beheld a towering figure in his early thirties, well over six feet tall, with enormous hands and a flowing chestnut beard, wearing a long black habit and a *skufya*, the black pointed cap of a Russian Orthodox monk. "And *this*," she continued, gesturing toward an easel, "is a picture of Father Roman." A large photograph showed a gray-eyed man in a belfry, beard blowing in the wind, against a leaden sky crossed by the ropes of Russian church bells. When I asked Father Roman whether I might meet with him later in the day, he produced from the folds of his habit a slim black Nokia telephone, whose ring tone, I learned, was a recording of Russian church bells.

The eighteen Danilov bells, which range in weight from twenty-two pounds to thirteen tons, were among the last to ring in the Soviet Union. Cast between 1682 and 1907, they are one of only a few intact sets of pre-Revolutionary Russian bells in existence. Some of them tolled at the burial of Nikolai Gogol. In the nineteen-thirties, the Danilov Monastery was converted into a "colony" for the children of dissidents. Most of the monks were shot in 1937, during the Great Purge, but the bells escaped the country. In 1930, an American philanthropist purchased the entire set at scrap-metal prices—about eighteen thousand dollars—and donated it to Harvard. The bells hung in Lowell House, where they rang on Sundays—as well as after home football victories, and victories over Yale, regardless of venue—for more than seventy years.

In 1983, Danilov became the first monastery to be officially returned to the Russian Orthodox Church. The belfry was restored, and equipped with fifteen bells, salvaged from various defunct churches. But these bells were mismatched, and some had been severely damaged. In 1988, Ronald Reagan expressed openness to the idea of returning the bells during a visit to the Danilov Monastery, where a photograph of Ronald and Nancy Reagan hangs to this day. But many things had to change, both in Russia and at Harvard, before the return could take place.

Ten years ago, as an undergraduate living at Lowell, I knew nothing about the bells' provenance, or the hopes and fortunes they embodied. I had a vague sense that they were old, and a more vivid sense of their being rung every Sunday at one in the afternoon—an hour at which I particularly liked to be undisturbed by loud clanging noises. The bells were the purview of a student group called the Klappermeisters, who took a keen interest in house traditions. For fifteen minutes on end, they hammered out peculiarly tuneless variations on melodies like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

In Russian history and culture, church bells occupy a mysteriously important position. Their tolling, Father Roman told me, has been known to bring miserly or hard-hearted people to repentance, and to dissuade would-be murderers and suicides. In "Crime and Punishment," Raskolnikov falls into a guilt-induced fever, hearing the ringing of Sunday church bells; he gives himself away by returning to the scene of the crime and compulsively ringing the murder victim's doorbell. In "War and Peace," the Kremlin's bells ring during Napoleon's invasion, disquieting the Grande Armée. Considered in Russian folklore to be animate beings, bells exercise a profound power over humankind—a power that lay dead or dormant for most of the twentieth century. The return of the Danilov bells represents the hope that this power might finally be recovered.



*Father Roman (left) rings one of the Danilov bells at Lowell House.*

HIEROMONK ANDRONIK/COURTESY DANILOV MONASTERY

In the Russian Orthodox faith, bells are widely considered to be "aural icons," symbolizing the trumpet calls blown on Mt. Sinai and the sounding of the trumpet for the raising of the dead before the Last Judgment. Just as painted icons are not intended to be mimetic representations of a spiritual object but magical windows into the world of the spiritual, a Russian bell is not a musical instrument but, as Father Roman puts it, "an icon of the voice of God." A Russian bell, he said, must sound rich, deep, sonorous, and clear, for how can the voice of God be otherwise? It must be loud, because God is omnipotent. Above all, Russian bells must never be tuned to either a major or a minor chord. "The voice of a bell is understood as just that," he said. "Not a note, not a chord, but a *voice*." Whereas Western European bells are tuned on a lathe to produce familiar major and minor chords, a Russian bell is prized for its individual, untuned voice, produced by an overlay of numerous partial frequencies, with only approximate relations to traditional pitches—a feature that gave the Lowell Klappermeisters' performances the denatured effect of music played on a touch-tone telephone. Where Western European bells play melodies, Russian bell ringing consists of rhythmic layered peals.

The afternoon I met Father Roman, I climbed the hundred and twenty-eight steps to the top of the Lowell bell tower. In the belfry were Father Roman, five of his Danilov colleagues, and Konstantin Mishurovsky, one of the bell ringers at the Kremlin. The window openings in the belfry were covered by netting. Outside, the distant Boston skyline glittered against an overcast sky. On the floor lay tiny feathers and other traces of falcon life, along with a few discarded fluorescent-orange foam earplugs of a type worn by some bell ringers—to the contempt of other bell ringers. Mishurovsky told me that earplugs prevent ringers from achieving the requisite delicate touch. When I asked him about hearing loss, he sighed, and said, "People always ask me this question. And to all of them I answer the same thing: *Ehhh*?"

At Lowell House, the largest bell was known as the Mother Earth bell. The Russians call it simply *Bolshoy* ("big") or *Blagovestnik* ("bearer of good tidings"), because the biggest bell is always used to play the *blagovest*—deep, regular tolls that announce the beginning of a service. The three largest bells are decorated with inscriptions in Old Church Slavonic, depictions of saints, or imperial medallions; the oldest bell in the collection—purportedly cast by a famous master, Fyodor Matorin, in 1682—also has cherubs, and what resembles a face of Bacchus, open-mouthed and surrounded by grapes. Unlike Western church bells, which move when they are rung, Russian bells remain stationary, and are rung by means of ropes attached to the clappers. To ring the vestibule-size Mother Earth bell in the Lowell belfry (every belfry is set up differently), one or two people stood inside the bell on an elevated platform, swinging the thirteen-hundred-pound clapper on a rope. The remaining bells were rung from a lower platform: the bass bells controlled by foot pedals; the tenors and altos, by a crisscross web of ropes. The "trills"—the smallest bells, some no bigger than a top hat—were attached to rein-like ropes held in the right hand and rung with a flicking wrist motion, producing an eerie birdlike jangle.

Shadowy, covered with verdigris, the bells seemed to move slightly even in repose, as if under water. It was easy to grasp why such bells might be treated as living things. Russian bells are given names like Swan (for producing a swanlike cry), Bear (for rumbling or unwieldiness), or Sheep (for a rattling or uneven tone). They ring with their "tongues," hang by their "ears," and have shoulders, waists, crowns, and skirts. They are considered to be capable of suffering, and even of a certain metallic obstinacy. When Peter the Great ordered that the Troitse-Sergiyeva bells be made into cannons, each bell resisted him in its own fashion: one disappeared and only later was discovered at the bottom of a pond; two

*"Because of your age, I'm going to recommend doing nothing."*

• •

proved impossible to remove from their hooks, then suddenly crashed to the ground. A fourth bell was beaten for a long time but didn't shatter, and buzzed reproachfully for three days afterward.

The ringing began. The deafening clangor seemed to be produced by something midway between metal and a living thing, and one felt physically assailed by an impossibly large and powerful force. At one point, I reached into my bag for a bottle of water; it was vibrating so vigorously that I mistook it for my cell phone. Between two and four ringers worked the ropes and pedals at any given time, while the others stood to one side, giving advice about who should stand where.

When Mishurovsky rang the bells, his normally skeptical expression was replaced by one of smiling beatitude, and he swayed and waved his arms. ("I hope you noticed how I move when I'm ringing," he told me later, rather sternly. "Like flying an airplane.") According to Mishurovsky, weather conditions affect the sound of bells, and they are heard to best advantage during a light rain, so it was lucky for us that a cold drizzle began to spray into the belfry through the screens. After a few minutes, I climbed a little ladder to the upper platform, to seek cover beneath the Mother Earth bell. The verdigris had worn off at the two points in the bell where the clapper struck, leaving them a shiny, burnished bronze. The graffiti scratched inside the bell included Russian names spelled with pre-Revolutionary orthography.

Mishurovsky and Father Roman climbed up to the platform. Roman caught my eye and pointed solicitously at his ears: they were going to ring the bell. Against the backdrop of the rhythmic din of the other bells, the two men began to swing the clapper slowly back and forth. Each time, the arc expanded, until finally the clapper touched the lip of the bell, producing a plangent, unforeseeable boom that made my whole body vibrate. They continued to swing the massive pendulum at the same rhythm, but varying the movement, so that sometimes the clapper hit both sides of the bell and sometimes only one side. When the peal came to an end and the bells had fallen silent, a hum continued to animate the air. Mishurovsky motioned to me to touch the big bell. The sensation resembled an electric shock.

One of the first mentions of bells in Russia occurs in the Novgorod Chronicle, which records the seizure, by the Prince of Polotsk, of the bells of Novgorod's St. Sophia Cathedral, in 1066. At the end of the fourteenth century, Russian metal foundries began forging both bells and cannons, inaugurating an uneasy partnership between the two great noisemakers: during times of war, the former were in constant danger of being melted down into the latter. But bells were also honored objects of state. Ivan the Terrible used to climb the belfry at four o'clock every morning in order to personally ring the Matins. Tardy monks were imprisoned for eight days.

The most famous item of Russian bell lore involves the matter of Ivan's heirs. Ivan had three surviving sons: Ivan Ivanovich, the eldest, and favorite, whom Ivan accidentally killed during a domestic quarrel; the mentally retarded Fyodor, who loved bells so much that he was known as Fyodor the Bell Ringer; and the epileptic infant Dmitri. Although Ivan was officially succeeded by Fyodor, the de-facto ruler was Fyodor's brother-in-law, Boris Godunov, an ambitious boyar who had his eye on the throne. To safeguard his own interests, Godunov banished Dmitri to the town of Uglich—where, a few years later, the young boy was found stabbed to death. When the Uglich bell sounded the death knell, a riot broke out: surely the boy had been murdered by Godunov's agents. (According to the official report, the wounds were self-inflicted during an epileptic seizure.) Godunov was so enraged that he ordered the bell's ears and tongue to be torn off. The mute and mutilated bell was then literally banished to Tobolsk, in Siberia, where the governor registered it as Uglich's "first inanimate exile."

Defying orders that the bronze guest remain silent forever, the people of Tobolsk outfitted it with a clapper and installed it in a local belfry. Because the bell had defended the Tsarevitch Dmitri, and was surely fond of children, a legend arose that, if you washed the clapper and collected the water in a special container, it became an elixir for curing children's diseases. This and other stories about bells standing up for the little man perhaps helped inspire Alexander Herzen, the great pre-Revolutionary intellectual populist, to name his influential clandestine journal *Kolokol:* "The Bell."

Both the tremendous popular attachment to Russian church bells and their systematic destruction by a radical regime have a historical precedent in France. During the French Revolution, bells were melted into coins and cannons, churches were converted into "Temples of Reason," and bell ringing was banned—suddenly bringing to light the bell's deep cultural significance. The French historian Alain Corbin, in his study "Village Bells," cites a report by an administrator in Somme: "There is no disputing the fact that what hit the people hardest in the Revolution was being deprived of their bells." The public outcry was such that French authorities were ultimately unable to enforce the anti-bell legislation. Belfries were eventually restored and augmented in a campanological golden age that lasted until the end of the nineteenth century.

In Russia, things happened differently. The Soviets took the destruction of bells, as they took many things, with deadly seriousness. Stalin's "Great Break" of the late nineteen-twenties aimed for a total transformation of every aspect of life. A staggered workweek was implemented, abolishing the concept of Sundays. Moscow's Church of the Nativity became a holding pen for circus lions, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour became the world's largest open-air swimming pool, and rural churches were turned into carpentry or plumbing collectives. Bell ringing was prohibited by law, and the destruction of thousands of tons of consecrated bronze that hung in belfries across the Soviet Union was regulated by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. "They fell with a roar and a thud, digging holes some five feet into the ground," the novelist Boris Pilnyak wrote of the bells in Uglich. "The whole town was full of the moaning of these ancient bells." Photographs from the period show proletarians swinging mallets in a sea of shattered bronze; teen-agers sit inside toppled bells, cigarettes dangling from their mouths. The smashed bells were melted into industrial material, realizing the state's favorite transformative metaphor: the recasting of metal. One peasant from Orlov later recalled that, the year the village dismantled its belfry, "a new tractor, its spurs glittering in the sun, drove down the length of the village street, making real to us boys the strange transformation from bell to machine."

Whereas France's bells were ultimately allowed to outlive their relevance, as industrialization and urbanization dissolved the village unit, the Soviets eliminated bells at a time when they were still beloved features of the cultural landscape. In twentieth-century Russian poetry, the bell appears as the hub of a timeless, rounded universe. "The sky's like a bell—the moon is its tongue," the popular poet Sergei Esenin wrote; and when Osip Mandelstam wanted to describe meaninglessness, he wrote, "Someone has pulled the bells/out of the blurred tower." If bells in Revolutionary France were the voice of the village, bells in Revolutionary Russia were still the voice of God.

The bells' history at Harvard begins with Charles R. Crane, who devoted a family fortune made in plumbing and fixtures to the pursuit of a career in international philanthropy and political activism. His beneficiaries ranged from Syrian revolutionaries to Macedonian Slavophiles and the Czech painter Alphonse Mucha (who subsequently used Crane's daughter, Josephine, as the model for Slavia on the hundred-koruna bill). A novel based on his adventures depicted Crane as an eccentric plutocrat who, according to an article in the *Times*, in 1909, employed "not only his colossal American fortune, but his brilliant American business ability for organizing a revolution throughout the world on strictly business principles." Crane traversed Albania on horseback and Iraq by car, and made some twenty-five trips to Russia; in 1917, he was on the same Petrograd-bound steamer as Leon Trotsky. He first learned about the Danilov bells in the late nineteen-twenties, through his friend the Byzantologist Thomas Whittemore, who is best known today for his restoration of the mosaics of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, which date to the age of Justinian.

Luis Campos, a former Klappermeister who now teaches history at Drew University, is completing a book for Harvard University Press on the purchase and return of the bells, highlighting the escapades of Crane and Whittemore. According to Campos, Crane in his youth deplored religious traditions. His earliest positive reaction to any religious object appears to have occurred when he saw Tibetan prayer wheels: the young businessman was greatly impressed by the idea, as Campos puts it, of "a machine that could do your praying for you." In later life, Crane became a devoted patron of Russian Orthodox art. Icons and pictures of cathedrals hung in his house, and he eventually bankrolled an entire Orthodox church choir in New York. When Whittemore heard about the dismantling of the Danilov belfry, he contacted Crane, who gave him carte blanche to purchase the bells. Crane donated the bells to Harvard in 1930, during the construction of Lowell House. A projected clock tower was hastily redesigned as a belfry capable of accommodating up to thirty-five tons of Russian bells.

Shortly after the bells arrived in Cambridge, a young Russian named Konstantin Saradzhev appeared at Lowell House. Whittemore had appointed the young man, who was described as "Moscow's most famous bell ringer," to oversee the bells' installation. Saradzhev spoke no English, and his entire luggage consisted of four pairs of socks and two handkerchiefs. At his request, he was taken immediately to see the bells, which were not as he had expected. "You have one bell that does not belong in the set," he announced. "And you should have seventeen others." A cable was sent to Addis Ababa, where Whittemore was travelling, to attend the coronation of Haile Selassie. Whittemore replied that Saradzhev was mistaken. Nonetheless, the offending bell was exiled across the river to the Harvard Business School.

During his time at Harvard, Saradzhev irritated the Lowell residents with incessant tapping on the bells. One day, the university's president, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, found him scraping the bells with a file, apparently trying to alter their pitch. Lowell told him to stop, and he became upset. Saradzhev, who turned out to be epileptic, began suffering recurrent seizures. He was eventually sent to the infirmary, where, one morning, his sheets were found covered in dark stains. According to a Lowell House tutor, Saradzhev admitted that he had been drinking ink—an antidote, he said, to poison that was being secretly administered to him. This was the last straw for President Lowell, who sent him back to Moscow.

The bells' installation was completed by a Russian émigré who was found by Crane's Russian Orthodox choir and who claimed to have rung the Danilov bells before the Revolution. The official public concert that Easter was a huge failure. "At once the horrid truth became apparent," the Lowell tutor wrote. "This . . . was no carillon . . . on which each note could be played independently with some semblance of a tune." "GIFT CHIMES PROVE WHITE ELEPHANT," a local headline read. In subsequent decades, however, Lowell House became rather proud of its cacophonous white elephant. Some students were devoted enough to start ringing the bells on Sundays and after football games, and the Klappermeisters were formed.

As for Konstantin Saradzhev, he was forgotten altogether—until the nineteen-seventies, when Anastasia Tsvetaeva, the sister of the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, published a memoir about his life and fate. As it turns out, Saradzhev really *was* Moscow's most famous bell ringer, known not just for his ringing but also for his superhuman aural acuity: between two adjacent whole tones, he perceived not just one half tone but a half tone flanked on either side by a hundred and twenty-one flats and a hundred and twenty-one sharps.

When Saradzhev was seven years old, the sound of a particularly powerful church bell caused him to lose consciousness, and he was captivated for life. Although he was a skilled pianist, he always referred to the piano as "that well-tempered nitwit": a piano can produce only twelve tones per octave, whereas Saradzhev perceived one thousand seven hundred and one. This sensitivity perhaps explains Saradzhev's intense delight in Russian bells, which are unparalleled in their microtonal complexity. Each bell sounds a unique cloud of untempered frequencies, producing intervals unplayable on any twelve-tone keyboard. By such acoustic fingerprints, Saradzhev could distinguish all four thousand of Moscow's church bells. He described his hearing as "true pitch" (by contrast with perfect pitch). The capacity for true pitch, he said, lay dormant in all humans, and would someday be awakened. But in the meantime he was, like a superhero, cruelly isolated by his own powers. He spent most of his time working on a theory of the future of music that was incomprehensible to anyone who couldn't hear a thousand or more distinct microtones in an octave.

Still, the "bell symphonies," which Saradzhev played in place of traditional church peals, were so popular that, even in the dead of winter, crowds filled the courtyard of the Church of St. Maron the Hermit to hear them. It is difficult to guess exactly how the symphonies sounded—Saradzhev struggled all his life with the problem of musical notation—but the effect, according to Tsvetaeva, was explosive: the sky seemed to collapse under a massive weight of thunder; the square filled with the metallic cries of gigantic bronze birds; the trills clattered overhead like swallows. Many listeners characterized Saradzhev's ringing as "the music of the spheres."

To his great frustration, Saradzhev was never able to play his symphonies as he imagined them. This is because Russian bells were invariably church bells, and had to be played according to church rules. Saradzhev had devised a new layout that would make it possible for the bells to be rung in more combinations, but no church would let him implement it. Professors at the Moscow Conservatory, including the composer Reinhold Glière, petitioned the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment to give Saradzhev a set of bells for secular use. The petition was denied.

When, in 1930, Saradzhev accepted a contract to work on installing the bells at Lowell House, he thought his dream had come true. Finally, some Americans, recognizing the greatness of his bell symphonies, were going to build him a symphonic belfry in America, equipped with thirty-four Russian bells: the seventeen Danilov bells, plus seventeen others of his own choosing. One can imagine Saradzhev's feelings when he got to Harvard. Nobody was interested in the more than a hundred symphonies he had composed—which were unplayable now, anyway, since the seventeen bells he had painstakingly chosen were nowhere to be seen.

Saradzhev is said to have returned to Moscow one night in 1931, unannounced, bringing his father a raccoon-fur hat with earflaps. America appeared not to have made much of an impression on him. "There's nothing there but Americans," he reportedly said, when pressed for details. Little is known of his later years. He is believed to have died in 1942, in a mental asylum in Moscow.

A long period of impasse followed the monastery's conversation with Ronald Reagan about the return of the Danilov bells. The university administration, pointing out that Harvard was the legal owner of the bells, objected that their removal would be expensive and possibly harmful to the Lowell buildings. The Lowell House master William Bossert expressed reservations about the project, which he suggested would cost tens of millions of dollars and result in a student-housing crisis.

In 1998, Bossert and his wife were succeeded by Diana Eck and her partner, Dorothy Austin, who were particularly attuned to the importance of spiritual objects. (Eck, who is a professor of comparative religion, has written several books on Hinduism and religious pluralism in America; Austin is an Episcopalian priest at Harvard's Memorial Church.) Another development took place in 2000, during a lunchtime conversation at the Danilov Monastery, where the American Ambassador to Russia and a United States Under-Secretary of Agriculture were working with the monastery on a food-aid-distribution project, and sampling some dishes made from soy protein (recalled as inventive but quite bland). Upon learning that both the Ambassador and the Under-Secretary were Harvard alumni, the monks raised the subject of the bells' return. The diplomats relayed to Harvard a suggestion that the monastery swap its replacement set of bells for the ones at Lowell House and also arrange for transport. In 2003, Harvard received a letter from Archimandrite Alexei, the father superior of Danilov Monastery. Alluding to the Book of Ecclesiastes, Alexei wrote that a new time had come in his country— "a time to gather stones together" which had been scattered in past decades.

In December, 2003, in the middle of a snowstorm, a Russian delegation, including Father Roman and Archiman-

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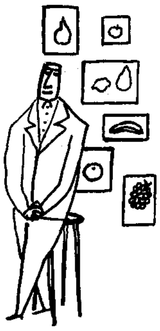
drite Alexei, arrived at Lowell House. In the bell tower, the Orthodox members of the group crossed themselves, and Father Alexei kissed his hand and touched an image of the Holy Trinity on one of the bells. Father Roman tapped some of the bells, and tested the ropes. Then he began to play. "This was the moment when we realized that these were truly their bells," Eck recalled. "He brought a sound from those bells that we had never heard before." Soon afterward, Harvard commissioned a study, which determined the bells' removal to be expensive but feasible.

In 2004, a group of Lowell bell ringers travelled to Russia for master classes in bell ringing, conducted by Father Roman and bell ringers from the Kremlin. The same year, Patriarch Alexei II, who was the head of the Russian Orthodox Church until his death, last December, issued a worldwide appeal for funding. The appeal was answered by the Link of Times, a nonprofit organization founded by the oil-and-metals tycoon Viktor Vekselberg with the aim of repatriating historically significant Russian works of art. Earlier that year, Vekselberg had purchased the entire Forbes family Fabergé collection, including nine imperial Easter eggs, valued at more than ninety million dollars. The removal and transportation of the Lowell House bells, and their replacement by an entirely new set, was comparatively inexpensive, costing around ten million dollars. In 2006, Eck and other Harvard representatives made a tour of several Russian bell foundries to commission the set of replacement bells.



During an exchange of gifts at Harvard last spring, the Harvard project manager presented Archimandrite Alexei with a handful of Liberty Bell-shaped lollipops. It was a wry allusion to an unspoken and potentially divisive asymmetry in the bells' significance: for Harvard, the bells were a curio or a fad; for the Danilov Monastery, they are a sacred patrimony. Beaming, Father Alexei kissed the lollipops and made the sign of the cross. Throughout the exchange, neither he nor his colleagues betrayed any sign of displeasure at the decades-long use of their "singing icons" to commemorate the defeats of the Yale football team. Meanwhile, it was the university's implicit stance that Harvard was trading a precious object for another of equal or greater value: a twenty-seven-ton aural monument to the university's public-spiritedness.

Even within Russia, it has been difficult to recapture the significance once accorded bells. Alain Corbin, writing about France, characterizes bell ringing as one of the historical phenomena that, "even though close to us in time, bear witness to a paradoxical distance." Bells, "once the occasion of so many obscure and forgotten passions," afford the modern historian a key to "a world we have just lost." In Russia, the challenge of unlocking this lost world faces not only historians but also a new generation of bell ringers and casters. Konstantin Mishurovsky, like Father Roman, is in his thirties, and grew up in a bell-deprived Soviet Union. Mishurovsky's mother gave him a recording of bells when he was a child. Mishurovsky told me that he first took up bell ringing to play in church services. In the nineteen-nineties, while he was studying biology at Moscow State University, he found himself at a research station on the White Sea, in a Karelian village called Kovda. Kovda had managed to preserve one of its church bells and, in honor of the village's five-hundredth anniversary, to acquire three more. Mishurovsky installed the bells and rang them at the anniversary celebrations. He soon realized that his true vocation was bell ringing, but he took the precaution of earning his biology degree. "Now I am so grateful to my studies," he said. "They gave me the scientific method."

Mishurovsky uses the scientific method to research bell acoustics, a field fraught with mystifications: apparently, many of the pitches that we hear when a bell is rung are "sonic mirages," which exist only in the listener's mind and do not appear in a spectrographic analysis. His work is geared toward modelling the sounds of bygone bells. He told me about one particularly valuable resource: a single 1963 Mosfilm recording of Rostov cathedral bells, as played by some of the last living bell ringers to have been trained in Imperial Russia. (The recording was made for a film adaptation of "War and Peace," and then used in virtually all the classic bell-ringing scenes of Soviet cinema, including the end of Andrei Tarkovsky's "Andrei Rublev.") After Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was rebuilt, in the nineties, Mishurovsky performed on the church's new bells for the first time after closely studying the Mosfilm recordings. The bells were cast by the manufacturer AMO-ZIL, which, in Soviet times, had produced armored cars for Stalin, the Politburo's limousines, and the Red Army's cargo trucks. Just as bells were once transformed into tractors, so truck factories are now being "refunctionalized" as bell foundries.

The replicas of the Danilov bells made for Lowell House were cast by Vera, one of the first post-Soviet bell foundries, in Voronezh. When I met the director and owner, Valery Anisimov, he was wearing a ponytail, a black shirt, a white suit, and white pointy-toed shoes. He said that the dream of building a bell factory came to him in 1988, the thousand-year anniversary of Christianity in Russia. As an engineer in a press-equipment factory, he had no idea how bells were made. At the Lenin State Library, he found exactly one book on the subject, written in 1912 by a Yaroslavl bell caster—Saradzhev's favorite book, according to Tsvetaeva. Russian bells, like Western European bells, are cast using the "lost wax" method. An inner core is made of a brick-like substance—the Yaroslavl caster recommends a blend of mud, flax, manure, horsehair, and straw—providing the shape of the bell's interior. This core is covered by a layer of wax in the shape of the bell, and then by a layer of clay. The wax is then melted, leaving a clay mold. Finally, the mold is filled with bronze. It wasn't easy, Anisimov said, to follow the 1912 instructions, using the facilities he had rented in a nineteen-eighties Soviet factory, and the first bells didn't come out very well. Nonetheless, demand was so high, as the Russian Orthodox Church reëstablished itself around the country, that they were bought up immediately. In 1991, Anisimov decided to open his own factory, on the site of a

## LET THE RECORD SHOW

I spent the morning trying to remember
the joke about a peanut and assault.
People dropped bombs on each other elsewhere.
I knew that many of them were at fault

and many blameless. I kept my office locked
and the lights off. The phone just kept ringing.
I didn’t answer. Nor when someone knocked.
I was supposed to be doing something.

—*Dora Malech*

moribund collective farm. Problems arose in securing the property, however. Anisimov was indicted on charges of “gangsterism” and spent three months in jail before being acquitted. Today, Vera is the world’s largest bell foundry, producing two hundred tons of bells each year.

Meanwhile, Russian bells continue to generate a folklore reflective of the times. In today’s health- and environment-obsessed climate, much is made of the medieval belief that bell ringing prevented the spread of plagues and epidemics. The psychiatrist Andrei Gnezdilov, the founder of Russia’s first hospice for the terminally ill, uses “bell therapy” as a pain-management technique; various rhythms and frequencies, he says, bring relief to about a third of cancer patients.

The curative and purifying properties of church bells are elaborated on numerous Russian Orthodox Web sites. Mishurovsky’s mentor, who was the official bell ringer of Patriarch Alexei II, has said that bells can kill flu viruses, and that he hasn’t had a cold since 1984. According to an oft-quoted ecologist, Fotiy Shipunov, formerly of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, bells produce ultrasonic waves that can curdle the proteins of jaundice-causing virus cells in a matter of seconds. Bell ringing has been used to combat mental retardation in children and to encourage the growth of flax plants. The physicist Anatoly Okhatrin claims that bells activate a field of super-lightweight particles called microleptons, which purify the air on a molecular level. Other Internet legends include accounts of bells warding off hurricanes and dispelling radiation.

In many of these stories, it is perhaps really the body politic, and not the human body, that is being cleansed of the accumulated ills of the Soviet era. Shipunov had spoken of an “amplifier” that can pick up the sound of bells from long-lost churches, even from a certain monastery near Kaluga, currently used as a cattle yard. The magical promise of bells is that we might be able to pluck the past from the very airwaves around us.

Last July, workers removed the entire northern face of the Lowell House bell tower. A hundred-and-fifty-foot crane gently lowered the old bells onto two flatbed trucks, where they briefly sat side by side with some of Anisimov’s replicas. Father Roman watched the proceedings perched on a nearby fire escape. A few weeks later, he helped install the new bells in Lowell House. The old bells, meanwhile, had embarked on a monthlong transatlantic voyage to St. Petersburg, where they were transferred to trucks and conveyed to Moscow via Novgorod and Tver. In each city, they were greeted by local authorities, clerics, and throngs of worshippers.

On September 12th, Patriarch Alexei II blessed the returned bells at Danilov, in a ceremony attended by Viktor Vekselberg, President Dmitri Medvedev, a Harvard delegation, and thousands of Orthodox believers. Father Roman rang the bells from a temporary ground-level platform. It took several months to install the bells in the monastery’s rather eye-catching salmon-colored belfry, where their first tolls rang out on March 17th. (September 12th and March 17th are consecrated to St. Daniel, who founded the monastery more than seven hundred years ago.) Patriarch Kirill I, who succeeded to the Patriarchate after the death of Alexei II, spoke of the bells’ return as marking the transition between “an epoch of destruction and an epoch of creation,” and expressed the hope that it would mark a new period in Russian-American relations as well. “It is not without the Divine Providence that the bells found themselves in one of the most important intellectual centers of the United States,” Kirill observed. He said that the bells’ odyssey could “help the scientists and students of Harvard University to also think about God and preserve the Christian faith in their hearts.”

Toward the end of my stay in Cambridge, in June, I made a trip to a gray waterfront warehouse in South Boston, where the seventeen replacement bells were in the care of a firm that stores, transports, and installs art objects. The head of the firm led me through multiple security doors and climate-controlled hallways filled with crates, canvases, and statues. Ten of the bells were lined up along a long corridor, beside two massive bronze statues that had once sat in Boston Common; standing vigil around the corner was a ten-foot statue of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science. We moved on to a cement-floored storeroom, where the new Mother Earth bell was enthroned on a wooden platform, surrounded by smaller bells, like a gigantic hen surrounded by chicks. Under fluorescent lights, the bas-relief faces of saints stood out on the pale bronze with luminous clarity. On the Mother Earth bell, the reliefs copied from the old bell had been supplemented by the coats of arms of Lowell House and Harvard University, the logo of the Link of Times Foundation, and an image of the Danilov Monastery. Because of differences in the shape of the mold, the new Mother Earth bell weighs two tons more than the original. Nonetheless, the sounds of the two bells are almost indistinguishable. ♦

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### SHOUTS & MURMURS

# AMEN, BROTHER

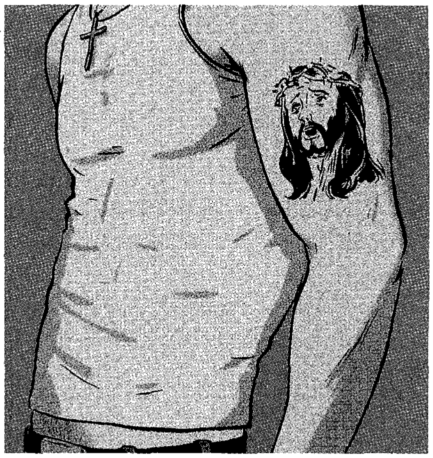
### BY PAUL RUDNICK

> What my therapist says is that I am a heterosexual with issues.
>
> —*Ted Haggard.*

Thank you, Ted, and God bless you, Ted's therapist. My name is Stan Belker, and I'm the pastor here at Our Lady of the Irredeemable Sinner, in Nashville, and, just like Ted, I, too, have struggled with my sexuality and have come out the other side, into the good green pastures of Christian family life.

As a teen-ager, I found that I was attracted both to serving Our Lord and to Jimmy Wiggins, the assistant coach of my high-school soccer team. I was in torment, and I would pray for hours on end, asking God why He would command me to love Him so deeply and at the same time just go and create Jimmy's snug little soccer shorts. I told my clergyman, Father Josiah, about my conflicting urges, and he tried to reconcile them by explaining that from certain angles Jesus looks just like Dennis Quaid. Still, I had agonizing doubts: was I just experiencing a completely normal phase of adolescent uncertainty, or were Jimmy Wiggins's firm, high buttocks really a calling card from Satan?

I became determined to change, to lead a wholly Christian life. In college, I began to date. At first, I took things slow, and I went out with only the most pious, virginal girls, who luckily often had strong, masculine jawlines. I became pre-engaged to Mary Ann Collier, and we'd sit in her sorority's front parlor reading Scripture together. "I think that St. Francis and St. Michael are my favorite holy men," Mary Ann said one evening. "You're right about Francis," I said. "He's to die for, but Michael should work on his calf muscles." "Stan," Mary Ann asked me, "is there something you'd like to tell me?" "Yes, there is," I replied gratefully. "I'd just like you to know that, if it weren't for the teachings of Our Lord, I would very much enjoy having sexual intercourse with you. But, because of our shared beliefs, I'll just have to make do with my lonely dorm room and this issue of *Men's Fitness*, the one with all those great ab routines."


ZOHAR LAZAR

I was in college when I had my first sexual encounter with a man—Brad Bicknell, a student in my Christian Values seminar. One day, as we stood side by side at the urinals discussing the importance of abstinence, Brad asked me out to dinner. "But just as friends and Christian study buddies," he assured me. "I have absolutely no intention of allowing our eyes to lock over the bread basket, because that would only lead to the surprisingly roomy back seat of my Toyota Celica, where we'd be forced to grapple with each other's moist, engorged man areas."

I'll be honest; I was curious. I needed to know exactly what sexual activity with another fellow might entail, so I could be ashamed of it. I warned Brad that, while I would be willing to sleep with him as a very small part of my journey to Christian wholeness, I didn't intend to enjoy the experience. In fact, while we were going at it, I said, "Brad, while what you're doing feels unbelievably good and just might cause my entire body to explode, it's nothing compared with what I hope to one day experience with my future wife, if she's double-jointed."

But I knew that what Brad and I were doing was wrong, especially after the fifty-eighth time. That was when I told Brad, quite firmly, "Brad, our being together is sinful and will only impede our development as responsible Christian adults. And your mustache tickles." The very next day, I met Stacy Crothers, the beautiful, adoring, steadfast woman who would become my wife. When I first met Stacy, in the cafeteria, I was smitten with her shy smile, her sparkling conversation, and the family photographs that she proudly took from her wallet, which included several snapshots of her sturdy quarterback brother, Frank, at the beach in a Speedo. "I have a very good feeling about us," I told Stacy on that very first day.

After a blissfully romantic courtship lasting only twelve years, Stacy and I were married. We had decided to save ourselves for our wedding night, because, as I reminded Stacy over and over, "The first time I make love to a woman, I want it to be sacred and special, and not just mindless, unending pleasure, like sex with a guy." And I have to say that, in the bedroom, Stacy and I got along like a house afire, especially if that house was willing to respond to the nickname Skipper.

But I'm not perfect. Like any human being, I had the occasional odd desire, the stray thought, the random yearning to, for example, seduce a seventeen-year-old lad after choir practice. Thanks to my years of work with a gifted therapist, I now fully realize that my actions were inappropriate, even though they were listed in boldface on the daily church calendar, as "Nude Prayer," "Nude Prayer in the Basement," and "Nude Prayer with Mutual Body Scrub."

So, yes, I was flawed, but my commitment to my parishioners, my wife, and my family remained my primary focus, until finally I was caught on tape, attempting to buy crystal meth, sexual services, and a plus-size tube top from a male prostitute. Of course, at the time, in my innocence, I didn't realize that Jack was a drug dealer and a prostitute; I assumed that his offer of drugs and orgies was just an expression of low self-esteem, and his way of telling me, "After we do the crystal and have sex with all these guys, I'd really like to talk about the story of Ruth." I felt that I was counselling Jack, sometimes for days at a time, in our cheap motel room, where I would always place a full-color photo portrait of my family atop the minibar.

When the truth finally came out, on every news show in the country, at first I was devastated, and I imagined that I would lose everything, including my church, my family, and my ten-per-cent Clergyman's Discount with Jack. But you know what? When I was being reviled on every front page, when I was hiding from the media in my den, clutching a bottle of bourbon, when I was trying to explain to Stacy that a male prostitute is just like Mary Magdalene in "Jesus Christ Superstar," that was when I truly felt the presence of my Saviour. That was when I heard the Lord say unto me, "Stan, now you can begin to truly know thyself, and therefore to know God. Stan, now your spiritual journey can really begin. Stan, put down that bottle and that copy of *People's* Sexiest Man Alive issue with Hugh Jackman on the cover, because he's never going to write back."

And since that day I have lived in the light. My wife and I have spent months in counselling, screaming and sobbing and finally coming back together, over our shared love for Christian living and early Jean-Claude Van Damme films. And I have told my children and my church that Stan Belker isn't perfect, and he's never going to be perfect. That Stan Belker is going to try with all his might to lead a clean Christian life, even if every now and then he still has a yen to offer Keanu Reeves a papal blessing in exchange for his underpants.

But those thoughts, those blips, they're not who I am. Just like Ted Haggard, I can take responsibility for my actions. Because when I saw Ted on "Oprah," spilling his guts, promoting his HBO special, and staying a good few feet away from his wife on the couch, I thought, Ted, if you can make it, I can make it. Together we can move forward, into the clean bright light of the Christian dawn. Together we can make only the most righteous choices. Together we will become decent Christian adults. Call me. ♦

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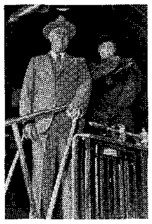

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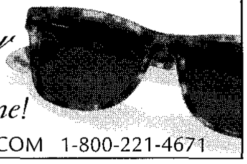

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### A REPORTER AT LARGE

# BRAIN GAIN

*The underground world of "neuroenhancing" drugs.*

### BY MARGARET TALBOT

A young man I'll call Alex recently graduated from Harvard. As a history major, Alex wrote about a dozen papers a semester. He also ran a student organization, for which he often worked more than forty hours a week; when he wasn't on the job, he had classes. Weeknights were devoted to all the schoolwork that he couldn't finish during the day, and weekend nights were spent drinking with friends and going to dance parties. "Trite as it sounds," he told me, it seemed important to "maybe appreciate my own youth." Since, in essence, this life was impossible, Alex began taking Adderall to make it possible.

Adderall, a stimulant composed of mixed amphetamine salts, is commonly prescribed for children and adults who have been given a diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. But in recent years Adderall and Ritalin, another stimulant, have been adopted as cognitive enhancers: drugs that high-functioning, overcommitted people take to become higher-functioning and more overcommitted. (Such use is "off label," meaning that it does not have the approval of either the drug's manufacturer or the Food and Drug Administration.) College campuses have become laboratories for experimentation with neuroenhancement, and Alex was an ingenious experimenter. His brother had received a diagnosis of A.D.H.D., and in his freshman year Alex obtained an Adderall prescription for himself by describing to a doctor symptoms that he knew were typical of the disorder. During his college years, Alex took fifteen milligrams of Adderall most evenings, usually after dinner, guaranteeing that he would maintain intense focus while losing "any ability to sleep for approximately eight to ten hours." In his sophomore year, he persuaded the doctor to add a thirty-milligram "extended release" capsule to his daily regimen.

Alex recalled one week during his junior year when he had four term papers due. Minutes after waking on Monday morning, around seven-thirty, he swallowed some "immediate release" Adderall. The drug, along with a steady stream of caffeine, helped him to concentrate during classes and meetings, but he noticed some odd effects; at a morning tutorial, he explained to me in an e-mail, "I alternated between speaking too quickly and thoroughly on some subjects and feeling awkwardly quiet during other points of the discussion." Lunch was a blur: "It's always hard to eat much when on Adderall." That afternoon, he went to the library, where he spent "too much time researching a paper rather than actually writing it—a problem, I can assure you, that is common to all intellectually curious students on stimulants." At eight, he attended a two-hour meeting "with a group focussed on student mental-health issues." Alex then "took an extended-release Adderall" and worked productively on the paper all night. At eight the next morning, he attended a meeting of his organization; he felt like "a zombie," but "was there to insure that the semester's work didn't go to waste." After that, Alex explained, "I went back to my room to take advantage of my tired body." He fell asleep until noon, waking "in time to polish my first paper and hand it in."

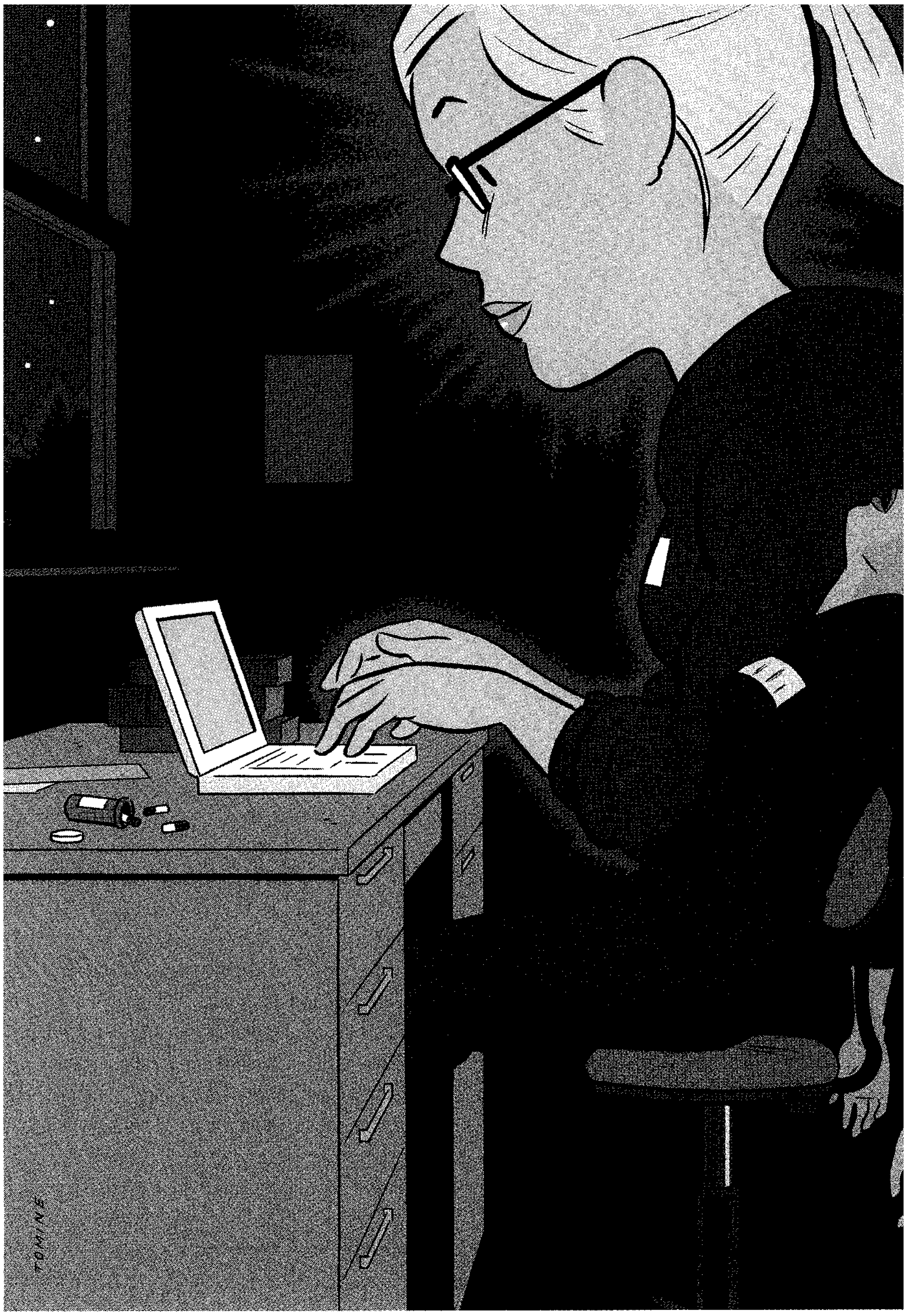
I met Alex one evening last summer, at an appealingly scruffy bar in the New England city where he lives. Skinny and bearded, and wearing faded hipster jeans, he looked like the lead singer in an indie band. He was ingratiating and articulate, and smoked cigarettes with an ironic air of defiance. Alex was happy enough to talk about his frequent use of Adderall at Harvard, but he didn't want to see his name in print; he's involved with an Internet start-up, and worried that potential investors might disapprove of his habit.

After we had ordered beers, he said, "One of the most impressive features of being a student is how aware you are of a twenty-four-hour work cycle. When you conceive of what you have to do for school, it's not in terms of nine to five but in terms of what you can physically do in a week while still achieving a variety of goals in a variety of realms—social, romantic, sexual, extracurricular, résumé-building, academic commitments." Alex was eager to dispel the notion that students who took Adderall were "academic automatons who are using it in order to be first in their class, or in order to be an obvious admit to law school or the first accepted at a consulting firm." In fact, he said, "it's often people"—mainly guys—"who are looking in some way to compensate for activities that are detrimental to their performance." He explained, "At Harvard, at least, most people are to some degree realistic about it. . . . I don't think people who take Adderall are aiming to be the top person in the class. I think they're aiming to be among the best. Or maybe not even among the best. At the most basic level, they aim to do better than they would have otherwise." He went on, "Everyone is aware of the fact that if you were up at 3 A.M. writing this paper it isn't going to be as good as it could have been. The fact that you were partying all weekend, or spent the last week being high, watching 'Lost'—that's going to take a toll."

Alex's sense of who uses stimulants for so-called "nonmedical" purposes is borne out by two dozen or so scientific studies. In 2005, a team led by Sean Esteban McCabe, a professor at the University of Michigan's Substance Abuse Research Center, reported that in the previous year 4.1 per cent of American undergraduates had taken prescription stimulants for off-label use; at one school, the figure was twenty-five per cent. Other researchers have found even higher rates: a 2002 study at a small college found that more than thirty-five per cent of the students had used prescription stimulants non-medically in the previous year.

Drugs such as Adderall can cause nervousness, headaches, sleeplessness, and

ADRIAN TOMINE



*Every era has its defining drug. Neuroenhancers are perfectly suited for our efficiency-obses*

*"I can't budge this t'ing. We shoulda popped him before he had dinner."*

• •

decreased appetite, among other side effects. An F.D.A. warning on Adderall's label notes that "amphetamines have a high potential for abuse" and can lead to dependence. (The label also mentions that adults using Adderall have reported serious cardiac problems, though the role of the drug in those cases is unknown.) Yet college students tend to consider Adderall and Ritalin benign, in part because they are likely to know peers who have taken the drugs since childhood for A.D.H.D. Indeed, McCabe reports, most students who use stimulants for cognitive enhancement obtain them from an acquaintance with a prescription. Usually, the pills are given away, but some students sell them.

According to McCabe's research team, white male undergraduates at highly competitive schools—especially in the Northeast—are the most frequent collegiate users of neuroenhancers. Users are also more likely to belong to a fraternity or a sorority, and to have a G.P.A. of 3.0 or lower. They are ten times as likely to report that they have smoked marijuana in the past year, and twenty times as likely to say that they have used cocaine. In other words, they are decent students at schools where, to be a great student, you have to give up a lot more partying than they're willing to give up.

The BoredAt Web sites—which allow college students to chat idly while they're ostensibly studying—are filled with messages about Adderall. Posts like these, from the BoredAtPenn site, are typical: "I have some Adderall—I'm sitting by room 101.10 in a grey shirt and headphones"; "I have Adderall for sale 20mg for $15"; "I took Adderall at 8 p.m., it's 6:30 a.m. and I've barely blinked." On the Columbia site, a poster with an e-mail address from CUNY complains that her friends take Adderall "like candy," adding, "I don't want to be at a disadvantage to everyone else. Is it really that dangerous? Will it fuck me up? My grades weren't that great this year and I could do with a bump." A Columbia student responds, "It's probably not a good idea if you're not prescribed," but offers practical advice anyway: "Keep the dose normal and don't grind them up or snort them." Occasional dissents ("I think there should be random drug testing at every exam") are drowned out by testimonials like this one, from the BoredAtHarvard site: "I don't want to be a pusher or start people on something bad, but Adderall is AMAZING."

Alex remains enthusiastic about Adderall, but he also has a slightly jaundiced critique of it. "It only works as a cognitive enhancer insofar as you are dedicated to accomplishing the task at hand," he said. "The number of times I've taken Adderall late at night and decided that, rather than starting my paper, hey, I'll organize my entire music library! I've seen people obsessively cleaning their rooms on it." Alex thought that generally the drug helped him to bear down on his work, but it also tended to produce writing with a characteristic flaw. "Often, I've looked back at papers I've written on Adderall, and they're verbose. They're belaboring a point, trying to create this airtight argument, when if you just got to your point in a more direct manner it would be stronger. But with Adderall I'd produce two pages on something that could be said in a couple of sentences." Nevertheless, his Adderall-assisted papers usually earned him at least a B. They got the job done. As Alex put it, "Productivity is a good thing."

Last April, the scientific journal *Nature* published the results of an informal online poll asking whether readers attempted to sharpen "their focus, concentration, or memory" by taking drugs such as Ritalin and Provigil—a newer kind of stimulant, known generically as modafinil, which was developed to treat narcolepsy. One out of five respondents said that they did. A majority of the fourteen hundred readers who responded said that healthy adults should be permitted to take brain boosters for nonmedical reasons, and sixty-nine per cent said that mild side effects were an acceptable risk. Though a majority said that such drugs should not be made available to children who had no diagnosed medical condition, a third admitted that they would feel pressure to give "smart drugs" to their kids if they learned that other parents were doing so.

Such competitive anxieties are already being felt in the workplace. Recently, an advice column in *Wired* featured a question from a reader worried about "a rising star at the firm" who was "using unprescribed modafinil to work crazy hours. Our boss has started getting on my case for not being as productive." And on Internet forums such as ImmInst, whose members share a nerdy passion for tweaking their cognitive function through drugs and supplements, people trade advice about dosages and "stacks"—improvised combinations—of neuroenhancers. ("Cut a tablet into fourths and took 25 mg every four hours, 4 times today, and had a great and productive day—with no side effects.") In one recent post, a fifty-two-year-old—who was working full time, studying for an advanced degree at night, and "married, etc."—wrote that after experimenting with modafinil he had settled on two daily doses of a hundred milligrams each. He believed that he was "performing a little better," adding, "I also feel slightly more animated when in discussion."

Not long ago, I met with Anjan Chatterjee, a neurologist at the University of Pennsylvania, in his office, which is tucked inside the labyrinthine Penn hospital complex. Chatterjee's main research interests are in subjects like the neurological basis of spatial understanding, but in the past few years, as he has heard more about students taking cognitive enhancers, he has begun writing about the ethical implications of such behavior. In 2004, he coined the term "cosmetic neurology" to describe the practice of using drugs developed for recognized medical conditions to strengthen ordinary cognition. Chatterjee worries about cosmetic neurology, but he thinks that it will eventually become as acceptable as cosmetic surgery has; in fact, with neuroenhancement it's harder to argue that it's frivolous. As he notes in a 2007 paper, "Many sectors of society have winner-take-all conditions in which small advantages produce disproportionate rewards." At school and at work, the usefulness of being "smarter," needing less sleep, and learning more quickly are all "abundantly clear." In the near future, he predicts, some neurologists will refashion themselves as "quality-of-life consultants," whose role will be "to provide information while abrogating final responsibility for these decisions to patients." The demand is certainly there: from an aging population that won't put up with memory loss; from overwrought parents bent on giving their children every possible edge; from anxious employees in an efficiency-obsessed, BlackBerry-equipped office culture, where work never really ends.

Chatterjee told me that many people who come to his clinic are cognitively preoccupied versions of what doctors call the "worried well." The day I visited his office, he had just seen a middle-aged woman, a successful Philadelphia lawyer, who mentioned having to struggle a bit to come up with certain names. "Here's an example of someone who by most measures is doing perfectly fine," Chatterjee said. "She's not having any trouble at work. But she notices she's having some problems, and it's very hard to know how much of that is just getting older." Of course, people in her position could strive to get regular exercise and plenty of intellectual stimulation, both of which have been shown to help maintain cognitive function. But maybe they're already doing so and want a bigger mental rev-up, or maybe they want something easier than sweaty workouts and Russian novels: a pill.

Recently, I spoke on the phone with Barbara Sahakian, a clinical neuropsychologist at Cambridge University, and the co-author of a December, 2007, article in *Nature*, "Professor's Little Helper." Sahakian, who also consults for several pharmaceutical companies, and her co-author, Sharon Morein-Zamir, reported that a number of their colleagues were using prescription drugs like Adderall and Provigil. Because the drugs are easy to buy online, they wrote, it would be difficult to stop their spread: "The drive for self-enhancement of cognition is likely to be as strong if not stronger than in the realms of 'enhancement' of beauty and sexual function." (In places like Cambridge, at least.)

When I spoke with Sahakian, she had just flown from England to Scottsdale, Arizona, to attend a conference, and she was tired. She might, justifiably, have forgone distractions like me, but she had her cell phone with her, and though it was a weekend morning some industrious person in the Cambridge news office had reached Sahakian in her hotel room, after she got out of the shower and before she had to rush to the first session. "We may be healthy and high-functioning, and think of ourselves that way, but it's very rare that we are actually functioning at our *optimal* level," Sahakian said. "Take me. I'm over here, and I've got jet lag and I've got to give a talk tonight and perform well, in what will be the middle of the night, U.K. time." She mentioned businessmen who have to fly back and forth across the Atlantic: "The difference between making a deal and not is huge and they sometimes only have one meeting to try and do it." She sympathized with them, but, she added, "we are a society that so wants a quick fix that many people are happy to take drugs."

For the moment, people looking for that particular quick fix have a limited choice of meds. But, given the amount of money and research hours being spent on developing drugs to treat cognitive decline, Provigil and Adderall are likely to be joined by a bigger pharmacopoeia. Among the drugs in the pipeline are ampakines, which target a type of glutamate receptor in the brain; it is hoped that they may stem the memory loss associated with diseases like Alzheimer's. But ampakines may also give healthy people a palpable cognitive boost. A 2007 study of sixteen healthy elderly volunteers found that five hundred milligrams of one particular ampakine "unequivocally" improved short-term memory, though it appeared to detract from episodic memory—the recall of past events. Another class of drugs, cholinesterase inhibitors, which are already being used with some success to treat Alzheimer's patients, have also shown promise as neuroenhancers. In one study, the drug donepezil strengthened the performance of pilots on flight simulators; in another, of thirty healthy young male volunteers, it improved verbal and visual episodic memory. Several pharmaceutical companies are working on drugs that target nicotine receptors in the brain, in the hope that they can replicate the cognitive uptick that smokers get from cigarettes.

Zack and Casey Lynch are a young couple who, in 2005, launched NeuroInsights, a company that advises investors on developments in brain-science technology. (Since then, they've also founded a lobbying group, the Neurotechnology Industry Organization.) Casey and Zack met as undergraduates at U.C.L.A.; she went on to get a master's degree in neuroscience at U.C.S.F., and he became an executive at a software company. Last summer, I had coffee with them in the Noe Valley neighborhood of San Francisco, and they both spoke with casual certainty about the coming market for neuroenhancers. Zack, who has a book being published this summer, called "The Neuro Revolution," said, "We live in an information society. What's the next form of human society? The *neuro*-society." In coming years, he said, scientists will understand the brain better, and we'll have improved neuroenhancers that some people will use therapeutically, others because they are "on the borderline of needing them therapeutically," and others purely "for competitive advantage."

Zack explained that he didn't really like the term "enhancement": "We're not talking about superhuman intelligence. No one's saying we're coming out with a pill that's going to make you smarter than Einstein! . . . What we're really talking about is *enabling* people." He sketched a bell curve on the back of a napkin. "Almost every drug in development is something that will take someone who's working at, like, forty per cent or fifty per cent, and take them up to eighty," he said.

New psychiatric drugs have a way of creating markets for themselves. Disorders often become widely diagnosed after drugs come along that can alter a set of suboptimal behaviors. In this way, Ritalin and Adderall helped make A.D.H.D. a household name, and advertisements for antidepressants have helped define shyness as a malady. If there's a pill that can clear up the wavering focus of sleep-deprived youth, or mitigate the tip-of-the-tongue experience of middle age, then those rather ordinary states may come to be seen as syndromes. As Casey put it, "The drugs get better, and the markets become bigger."

"Yes," Zack said. "We call it the lifestyle-improvement market."

The Lynches said that Provigil was a classic example of a related phenomenon: mission creep. In 1998, Cephalon, the pharmaceutical company that manufactures it, received government approval to market the drug, but only for "excessive daytime sleepiness" due to narcolepsy; by 2004, Cephalon had obtained permission to expand the labelling, so that it included sleep apnea and "shift-work sleep disorder." Net sales of Provigil climbed from a hundred and ninety-six million dollars in 2002 to nine hundred and eighty-eight million in 2008.

Cephalon executives have repeatedly said that they do not condone off-label use of Provigil, but in 2002 the company was reprimanded by the F.D.A. for distributing marketing materials that presented the drug as a remedy for tiredness, "decreased activity," and other supposed ailments. And in 2008 Cephalon paid four hundred and twenty-five million dollars and pleaded guilty to a federal criminal charge relating to its promotion of off-label uses for Provigil and two other drugs. Later this year, Cephalon plans to introduce Nuvigil, a longer-lasting variant of Provigil. Candace Steele, a spokesperson, said, "We're exploring its possibilities to treat excessive sleepiness associated with schizophrenia, bipolar depression, traumatic injury, and jet lag." Though she emphasized that Cephalon was not developing Nuvigil as a neuroenhancer, she noted, "As part of the preparation for some of these other diseases, we're looking to see if there's improvement in cognition."

Unlike many hypothetical scenarios that bioethicists worry about—human clones, "designer babies"—cognitive enhancement is already in full swing. Even if today's smart drugs aren't as powerful as such drugs may someday be, there are plenty of questions that need to be asked about them. How much do they actually help? Are they potentially harmful or addictive? Then, there's the question of what we mean by "smarter." Could enhancing one kind of thinking exact a toll on others? All these questions need proper scientific answers, but for now much of the discussion is taking place furtively, among the increasing number of Americans who are performing daily experiments on their own brains.

Paul Phillips was unusual for a professional poker player. When he joined the circuit, in the late nineties, he was already a millionaire: a twenty-something tech guy who had started off writing software, helped found an Internet portal called go2net, and cashed in at the right moment. He was cerebral and, at times, brusque. His nickname was Dot Com. On the international poker-tournament scene—where the male players tend to be either unabashedly schlumpy or sharply dressed in the manner of a Vegas hotel manager—Phillips cultivated a geeky New Wave style. He wore vintage shirts in wild geometric patterns; his hair was dyed orange or silver one week, shaved off the next. Most unusual of all, Phillips talked freely about taking prescription drugs—Adderall and, especially, Provigil—in order to play better cards.

He first took up the game in 1995, when he was in college, at U.C. San Diego. He recalled, "It was very mathematical, but you could also inject yourself into the game and manipulate the other guy with words"—more so than in a game

*"What should you do? Here's what you should do: invent a time machine, go back sixteen months and convert everything to cash."*

like chess. Phillips soon felt that he had mastered the strategic aspects of poker. The key variable was execution. At tournaments, he needed to be able to stay focussed for fourteen hours at a stretch, often for several days, but he found it difficult to do so. In 2003, a doctor gave him a diagnosis of A.D.H.D., and he began taking Adderall. Within six months, he had won $1.6 million at poker events—far more than he'd won in the previous four years. Adderall not only helped him concentrate; it also helped him resist the impulse to keep playing losing hands out of boredom. In 2004, Phillips asked his doctor to give him a prescription for Provigil, which he added to his Adderall regimen. He took between two hundred and three hundred milligrams of Provigil a day, which, he felt, helped him settle into an even more serene and objective state of mindfulness; as he put it, he felt "less like a participant than an observer—and a very effective one." Though Phillips sees neuroenhancers as essentially steroids for the brain, they haven't yet been banned from poker competitions.

*"I said 'neighborhood watch'; they said 'peeping Tom.'"*

Last summer, I visited Phillips in the high-desert resort town of Bend, Oregon, where he lives with his wife, Kathleen, and their two daughters, Ivy and Ruby. Phillips, who is now thirty-six, seemed a bit out of place in Bend, where people spend a lot of time skiing and river rafting. Among the friendly, faithfully recycling locals, he was making an effort to curb his caustic side. Still, when I first sent Phillips an e-mail asking him to explain, more precisely, how Provigil affected him, he couldn't resist a smart-ass answer: "More precisely: after a pill is consumed, tiny molecules are absorbed into the bloodstream, where they eventually cross the blood-brain barrier and influence the operation of the wetware up top."

In person, he was more obliging. He picked me up at the Bend airport driving a black convertible BMW, and we went for coffee at a cheery café called Thump. Phillips wore shorts and flip-flops and his black T-shirt displayed an obscure programming joke. "Poker is about sitting in one place, watching your opponents for a long time, and making better observations about them than they make about you," he said. With Provigil, he "could process all the information about what was going on at the table and do something about it." Though there is no question that Phillips became much more successful at poker after taking neuroenhancers, I asked him if his improvement could be explained by a placebo effect, or by coincidence. He doubted it, but allowed that it could. Still, he said, "there's a sort of clarity I get with Provigil. With Adderall, I'd characterize the effect as correction—correction of an underlying condition. Provigil feels like enhancement." And, whereas Adderall made him "jittery," Provigil's effects were "completely limited to my brain." He had "zero difficulty sleeping."

On the other hand, Phillips said, Provigil's effects "have attenuated over time. The body is an amazing adjusting machine, and there's no upside that I've been able to see to just taking more." A few years ago, Phillips tired of poker, and started playing competitive Scrabble. He was good, but not that good. He was older than many of his rivals, and he needed to undertake a lot of rote memorization, which didn't come as easily as it once had. "I stopped short of memorizing the entire dictionary, and to be really good you have to get up to eight- and nine-letter words," he told me. "But I did learn every word up to five letters, plus maybe ten thousand seven- and eight-letter words." Provigil, he said, helped with the memorization process, but "it's not going to make you smarter. It's going to make you better able to use the tools you have for a sustained period."

Similarly, a journalist I know, who takes the drug when he has to stay up all night on deadline, says that it doesn't help in the phase when he's trying to figure out what he wants to say or how to structure a story; but, once he's arrived at those insights, it helps him stay intent on completing a draft. Similarly, a seventy-four-year-old who published a letter in *Nature* last year offered a charmingly specific description of his modafinil habit: "Previously, I could work competently on the fracture-mechanics of high-silica stone (while replicating ancient tool-flaking techniques) for about an hour. With modafinil, I could continue for almost three hours."

Cephalon, the Provigil manufacturer, has publicly downplayed the idea that the drug can be used as a smart pill. In 2007, the company's founder and C.E.O., Frank Baldino, Jr., told a reporter from the trade journal *Pharmaceutical Executive*, "I think if you're tired, Provigil will keep you awake. If you're not tired, it's not going to do anything." But Baldino may have been overly modest. Only a few studies have been done of Provigil's effects on healthy, non-sleep-deprived volunteers, but those studies suggest that Provigil does provide an edge, at least for some kinds of challenges. In 2002, researchers at Cambridge University gave sixty healthy young male volunteers a battery of standard cognitive tests. One group received modafinil; the other got a placebo. The modafinil group performed better on several tasks, such as the "digit span" test, in which subjects are asked to repeat increasingly longer strings of numbers forward, then backward. They also did better in recognizing repeated visual patterns and on a spatial-planning challenge known as the Tower of London task. (It's not nearly as fun as it sounds.) Writing in the journal *Psychopharmacology*, the study's authors said the results suggested that "modafinil offers significant potential as a cognitive enhancer."

Phillips told me that, much as he believes in neuroenhancers, he did not want to be "the poster boy for smart-in-a-pill." At one point, he said, "We really don't know the possible implications for long-term use of these things." (He recently stopped taking Provigil every day, replacing it with another prescription stimulant.) He found the "arms-race aspect" of cognitive enhancement distasteful, and didn't like the idea that parents might force their kids to take smart pills. He sighed when I suggested that adults, too, might feel coerced into using the drugs. "Yeah, in a competitive field—if suddenly a quarter of the people are more equipped, but you don't want to take the risks with your body—it could begin to seem terribly unfair," he said. "I don't think we need to be turning up the crank another notch on how hard we work. But the fact is, the baseline competitive level is going to reorient around what these drugs make possible, and you can choose to compete or not."

In the afternoon, we drove over to Phillips's house—a big place, handsome and new, with a sweeping deck overhanging the Deschutes River. Inside, toys were strewn across the shag carpeting. Phillips was waiting for his wife and daughters to come home from the swimming pool, and, sitting in his huge, high-ceilinged living room, he looked a little bored. He told me that he had recently decided to apply to graduate school in computer programming. It was going to be hard—getting out all those applications, convincing graduate programs that he was serious about returning to school. But he had, as he put it, "exhausted myself on all forms of leisure," and felt nostalgic for his last two years of college, when he had discovered computer programming. "That was the most purely intellectually satisfying period of my whole life," he said. "It transformed my brain from being all over the place to a reasonable edifice of knowledge about something." Back then, he hadn't taken any smart pills. "I would have been a freakin' dynamo in college if I'd been taking them," he said. "But, still, I had to *find* computers. That made a bigger difference than anything else—finding something I just couldn't get enough of."

Provigil may well confer a temporary advantage on healthy people, but this doesn't mean that it's ready to replace your morning espresso. Anjan Chatterjee told me that there "just aren't enough studies of these drugs in normal people." He said, "In the situations where they do help, do they come with a cost?" As he wrote in a recent letter to *Nature*, "Most seasoned physicians have had the sobering experience of prescribing medications that, despite good intentions, caused bad outcomes." Given that cognitive enhancement is a choice, not a necessity, the cost-benefit calculation for neuroenhancers should probably be different than it is for, say, heart medications.

Provigil can be habit-forming. In a study published recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, a group led by Nora Volkow, the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, scanned the brains of ten men after they had been given a placebo, and also after they had been given a dose of modafinil. The modafinil appeared to lead to an increase in the brain chemical dopamine. "Because drugs that increase dopamine have the potential for abuse," Volkow's report concluded, "these results suggest that risk for addiction in vulnerable persons merits heightened awareness." (Cephalon, in a response to the report, notes that Provigil's label urges physicians to monitor patients closely, especially those with a history of drug abuse.) On the Web site Erowid, where people vividly, and anonymously, report their experiences with legal and illegal drugs, some modafinil users have described a dependency on the drug. One man, who identified himself as a former biochemistry student, said that he had succeeded in kicking cocaine and opiate habits but couldn't stop using modafinil. Whenever he ran out of the drug, he said, "I start to freak out." After "4-5 days" without it, "the head fog starts to come back."

Eliminating foggy-headedness seems to be the goal of many users of neuroenhancers. But can today's drugs actually accomplish this? I recently posed this question to Anjan Chatterjee's colleague Martha Farah, who is a psychologist at Penn and the director of its Center for Cognitive Neuroscience. She has been writing about neuroenhancers for several years from a perspective that is deeply fascinated and mildly critical, but basically in favor—with the important caveat that we need to know much more about how these drugs work. I spoke with her one afternoon at her research center, which is in a decidedly unfuturistic-looking Victorian house on Walnut Street, in Philadelphia. Farah, who is an energetic conversationalist, had bought canned espresso drinks for us. Though she does not take neuroenhancers, she has found that her interest in them has renewed her romance with the next best thing: caffeine.

Farah had just finished a paper in which she reviewed the evidence on prescription stimulants as neuroenhancers from forty laboratory studies involving healthy subjects. Most of the studies looked at one of three types of cognition: learning, working memory, and cognitive control. A typical learning test asks subjects to memorize a list of paired words; an hour, a few days, or a week later, they are presented with the first words in the pairs and asked to come up with the second. The studies on learning showed that neuroenhancers did improve retention. The benefits were more apparent in studies where subjects had been asked to remember information for several days or longer.

Working memory has been likened to a mental scratch pad: you use it to keep relevant data in mind while you're completing a task. (Imagine a cross-examination, in which a lawyer has to keep track of the answers a witness has given, and formulate new questions based on them.) In one common test, subjects are shown a series of items—usually letters or numbers—and then presented with challenges: Was this number or letter in the series? Was this one? In the working-memory tests, subjects performed better on neuroenhancers, though several of the studies suggested that the effect depended on how good a subject's working memory was to begin with: the better it was, the less benefit the drugs provided.

The third category that the studies examined was cognitive control—how effectively you can check yourself in circumstances where the most natural response is the wrong one. A classic test is the Stroop Task, in which people are shown the name of a color (let's say orange) written in a different color (let's say purple). They're asked to read the word (which is easy, because our habitual response to a word is to read it) or to name the ink color (which is harder, because our first impulse is to say "orange"). These studies presented a more mixed picture, but over all they showed some benefit "for most normal healthy subjects"—especially for people who had inherently poorer cognitive control.

Farah told me, "These drugs will definitely help some technically normal people—that is, people who don't meet the diagnostic criteria for A.D.H.D. or any kind of cognitive impairment." But, she emphasized, "they will help people in the lower end of the ability range more than in the higher end." One explanation for this phenomenon might be that, the more adept you are at a given task, the less room you have to improve. Farah has a hunch that there may be another reason that existing drugs, so far, at least, don't offer as much help to people with greater intellectual abilities. Drugs like Ritalin and Adderall work, in part, by elevating the amount of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is something you want just enough of: too little, and you may not be as alert and motivated as you need to be; too much, and you may feel overstimulated. Neuroscientists have discovered that some people have a gene that leads the brain to break down dopamine faster, leaving less of it available; such people are generally a little worse at certain cognitive tasks. People with more available dopamine are generally somewhat better at the same tasks. It makes sense, then, that people with naturally low dopamine would benefit more from an artificial boost.

Of course, learning, working memory, and cognitive control represent just a few aspects of thinking. Farah concluded that studies looking at other kinds of cognition—verbal fluency, for instance—were too few and too contradictory to tell us much. And the effects of neuroenhancers on some vital forms of intellectual activity, such as abstract thought and creativity, have barely been studied at all. Farah said that the extant literature was concerned with "fairly boring kinds of thinking—how long can you stay vigilant while staring at a screen and waiting for a little light to blink." She added, "It would be great to have studies of more flexible kinds of thought."

Both Chatterjee and Farah have wondered whether drugs that heighten users' focus might dampen their creativity. After all, some of our best ideas come to us not

*"A group of taxpayers are here to give you your bonus, sir."*

Victoria Roberts

*"If you want a positive outlook, you're going to have to turn your chair around, Walter."*

when we sit down at a desk but, rather, when we're in the shower or walking the dog—letting our minds roam. Jimi Hendrix reported that the inspiration for "Purple Haze" came to him in a dream; the chemist Friedrich August Kekule claimed that he discovered the ring structure of benzene during a reverie in which he saw the image of a snake biting its tail. Farah told me, "Cognitive psychologists have found that there is a trade-off between attentional focus and creativity. And there is some evidence that suggests that individuals who are better able to focus on one thing and filter out distractions tend to be less creative."

Farah and Chatterjee recently completed a preliminary study looking at the effect of one ten-milligram dose of Adderall on sixteen students doing standard laboratory tests of creative thinking. They did not find that this low dose had a detrimental effect, but both believe that this is only the beginning of the vetting that must be done. "More and more of our young people are using these drugs to help them work," Farah said. "They've got their laptop, their iPhone, and their Adderall. This rising generation of workers and leaders may have a subtly different style of thinking and working, because they're using these drugs or because they learned to work using these drugs, so that even if you take the drugs away they'll still have a certain approach. I'm a little concerned that we could be raising a generation of very focussed accountants."

Farah has also been considering the ethical complications resulting from the rise of smart drugs. Don't neuroenhancers confer yet another advantage on the kind of people who already can afford private tutors and prep courses? At many colleges, students have begun calling the off-label use of neuroenhancers a form of cheating. Writing last year in the *Cavalier Daily*, the student newspaper of the University of Virginia, a columnist named Greg Crapanzano argued that neuroenhancers "create an unfair advantage for the users who are willing to break the law in order to gain an edge. These students create work that is dependent on the use of a pill rather than their own work ethic." Of course, it's hard to imagine a university administration that would require students to pee in a cup before they get their blue books. And though secretly taking a neuroenhancer for a three-hour exam does seem unfair, condemning the drugs' use seems extreme. Even with the aid of a neuroenhancer, you still have to write the essay, conceive the screenplay, or finish the grant proposal, and if you can take credit for work you've done on caffeine or nicotine, then you can take credit for work produced on Provigil.

Farah questions the idea that neuroenhancers will expand inequality. Citing the "pretty clear trend across the studies that say neuroenhancers will be less helpful for people who score above average," she said that cognitive-enhancing pills could actually become levellers, if they are dispensed cheaply. A 2007 discussion paper published by the British Medical Association also makes this point: "Equality of opportunity is an explicit goal of our education system, giving individuals the best chance of achieving their full potential and of competing on equal terms with their peers. Selective use of neuroenhancers amongst those with lower intellectual capacity, or those from deprived backgrounds who do not have the benefit of additional tuition, could enhance the educational opportunities for those groups." If the idea of giving a pill as a substitute for better teaching seems repellent—like substituting an I.V. drip of synthetic nutrition for actual food—it may nevertheless be preferable to a scenario in which only wealthy kids receive a frequent mental boost.

Farah was one of several scholars who contributed to a recent article in *Nature*, "Towards Responsible Use of Cognitive Enhancing Drugs by the Healthy." The optimistic tone of the article suggested that some bioethicists are leaning toward endorsing neuroenhancement. "Like all new technologies, cognitive enhancement can be used well or poorly," the article declared. "We should welcome new methods of improving our brain function. In a world in which human workspans and lifespans are increasing, cognitive enhancement tools—including the pharmacological—will be increasingly useful for improved quality of life and extended work productivity, as well as to stave off normal and pathological age-related cognitive declines. Safe and effective cognitive enhancers will benefit both the individual and society." The British Medical Association report offered a similarly upbeat observation: "Universal access to enhancing interventions would bring up the base-line level of cognitive ability, which is generally seen to be a good thing."

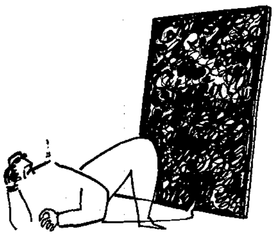
And yet when enthusiasts share their vision of our neuroenhanced future it can sound dystopian. Zack Lynch, of NeuroInsights, gave me a rationale for smart pills that I found particularly grim. "If you're a fifty-five-year-old in Boston, you have to compete with a twenty-six-year-old from Mumbai now, and those kinds of pressures are only going to grow," he began. Countries other than the U.S. might tend to be a little looser with their regulations, and offer approval of new cognitive enhancers first. "And if you're a company that's got forty-seven offices worldwide, and all of a sudden your Singapore office is using cognitive enablers, and you're saying to Congress, 'I'm moving all my financial operations to Singapore and Taiwan, because it's legal to use those there,' you bet that Congress is going to say, 'Well, O.K.' It will be a moot question then. It would be like saying, 'No, you can't use a cell phone. It might increase productivity!' "

If we eventually decide that neuroenhancers work, and are basically safe, will we one day enforce their use? Lawmakers might compel certain workers—emergency-room doctors, air-traffic controllers—to take them. (Indeed, the Air Force already makes modafinil available to pilots embarking on long missions.) For the rest of us, the pressure will be subtler—that queasy feeling I get when I remember that my younger colleague is taking Provigil to meet deadlines. All this may be leading to a kind of society I'm not sure I want to live in: a society where we're even more overworked and driven by technology than we already are, and where we have to take drugs to keep up; a society where we give children academic steroids along with their daily vitamins.

Paul McHugh, a psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins University, has written skeptically about cosmetic neurology. In a 2004 essay, he notes that at least once a year in his private practice he sees a young person—usually a boy—whose parents worry that his school performance could be better, and want a medication that will assure it. In most of these cases, "the truth is that the son does not have the superior I.Q. of his parents," though the boy may have other qualities that surpass those of his parents—he may be "handsome, charming, athletic, graceful." McHugh sees his job as trying to get the parents to "forget about adjusting him to their aims with medication or anything else." When I spoke with him on the phone, McHugh expanded on this point: "Maybe it's wrong-footed trying to fit people into the world, rather than trying to make the world a better place for people. And if the idea is that the only college your child can go to is Harvard, well, maybe *that's* the idea that needs righting."

If Alex, the Harvard student, and Paul Phillips, the poker player, consider their use of neuroenhancers a private act, Nicholas Seltzer sees his habit as a pursuit that aligns him with a larger movement for improving humanity. Seltzer has a B.A. from U.C. Davis and a master's degree in security policy from George Washington University. But the job that he obtained with these credentials—as a researcher at a defense-oriented think tank, in northern Virginia—has not left him feeling as intellectually alive as he would like. To compensate, he writes papers in his spare time on subjects like "human biological evolution and warfare." He also primes his brain with artificial challenges; even when he goes to the rest room at the office, he takes the opportunity to play memory or logic games on his cell phone. Seltzer, who is thirty, told me that he worried that he "didn't have the mental energy, the endurance, the—I don't know what to properly call this—the *sponginess* that I seem to recall having when I was younger."

Suffice it to say that this is not something you notice when you talk to Seltzer. And though our memory is probably at its peak in our early twenties, few thirty-year-olds are aware of a deficit. But Seltzer is the Washington-wonk equivalent of those models and actors in L.A. who discern tiny wrinkles long before their agent does. His girlfriend, a technology consultant whom he met in a museum, is nine years younger, and he was already thinking about how his mental fitness would stand up next to hers. He told me, "She's twenty-one, and I want to stay young and vigorous and don't want to be a burden on her later in life." He didn't worry about visible signs of aging, but he wanted to keep his mind "nimble and healthy for as long as possible."



Seltzer considers himself a "transhumanist," in the mold of the Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom and the futurist writer and inventor Ray Kurzweil. Transhumanists are interested in robots, cryogenics, and living a really, really long time; they consider biological limitations that the rest of us might accept, or even appreciate, as creaky obstacles to be aggressively surmounted. On the ImmInst forums—"ImmInst" stands for "Immortality Institute"—Seltzer and other members discuss life-extension strategies and the potential benefits of cognitive enhancers. Some of the forum members limit themselves to vitamin and mineral supplements. Others use Adderall or modafinil or, like Seltzer, a drug called piracetam, which was first marketed by a Belgian pharmaceutical company in 1972 and, in recent years, has become available in the U.S. from retailers that sell supplements. Although not approved for any use by the F.D.A., piracetam has been used experimentally on stroke patients—to little effect—and on patients with a rare neurological condition called progressive myoclonus epilepsy, for whom it proved helpful in alleviating muscle spasms. Data on piracetam's benefits for healthy people are virtually nonexistent, but many users believe that the drug increases blood flow to the brain.

From the time I first talked to Seltzer, it was clear that although he felt cognitive enhancers were of practical use, they also appealed to him on an aesthetic level. Using neuroenhancers, he said, "is like customizing yourself—customizing your brain." For some people, he went on, it was important to enhance their mood, so they took antidepressants; but for people like him it was more important "to increase mental horsepower." He added, "It's fundamentally a choice you're making about how you want to experience consciousness." Whereas the nineties had been about "the personalization of technology," this decade was about the personalization of the brain—what some enthusiasts have begun to call "mind hacking."

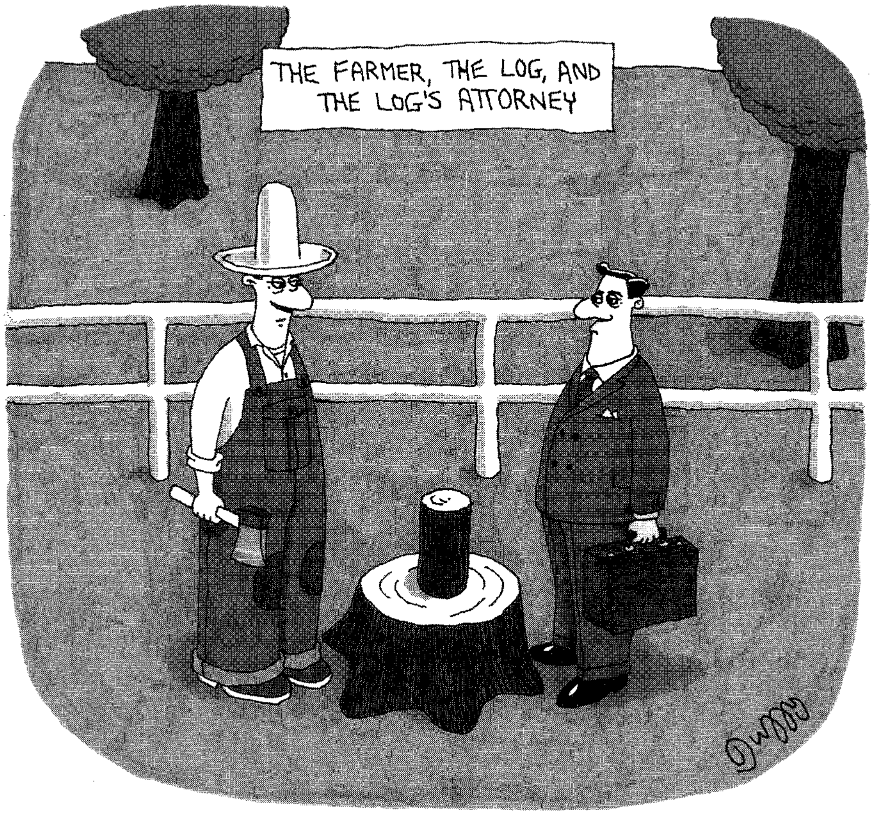
Of course, the idea behind mind-hacking isn't exactly new. Fortifying one's mental stamina with drugs of various kinds has a long history. Sir Francis Bacon consumed everything from tobacco to saffron in the hope of goosing his brain. Balzac reputedly fuelled sixteen-hour bouts of writing with copious servings of coffee, which, he wrote, "chases away sleep, and gives us the capacity to engage a little longer in the exercise of our intellects." Sartre dosed himself with speed in order to finish "Critique of Dialectical Reason." My college friends and I wrote term papers with the sweaty-palmed assistance of NoDoz tablets. And, before smoking bans, entire office cultures chugged along on a collective nicotine buzz—at least, if "Mad Men" is to be believed. Seltzer and his interlocutors on the ImmInst forum are just the latest members of a seasoned cohort, even if they have more complex pharmaceuticals at their disposal.

I eventually met Seltzer in an underground food court not far from the Pentagon. We sat down at a Formica table in the dim light. Seltzer was slim, had a shaved head, and wore metal-frame glasses; matching his fastidious look, he spoke precisely, rarely stumbling over his words. I asked him if he had any ethical worries about smart drugs. After a pause, he said that he might have a concern if somebody popped a neuroenhancer before taking a licensing exam that certified him as, say, a brain surgeon, and then stopped using the drug. Other than that, he couldn't see a problem. He said that he was a firm believer in the idea that "we should have a fair degree of liberty to do with our bodies and our minds as we see fit, so long as it doesn't impinge on the basic rights, liberty, and safety of others." He argued, "Why would you *want* an upward limit on the intellectual capabilities of a human being? And, if you have a very nationalist viewpoint, why wouldn't you want our country to have the advantage over other countries, particularly in what some people call a knowledge-based economy?" He went on, "Think about the complexity of the intellectual tasks that people need to accomplish today. Just trying to understand what Congress is doing is not a simple thing! The complexity of understanding the gamut of scientific and technical and social issues is difficult. If we had a tool that enabled more people to understand the world at a greater level of sophistication, how can we prejudice ourselves against the notion, simply because we don't like athletes to do it? To me, it doesn't seem like the same question. And it deserves its own debate."

Seltzer had never had a diagnosis of any kind of learning disorder. But he added, "Though I wouldn't say I'm dyslexic, sometimes when I type prose, after I look back and read it, I've frequently left out words or interposed words, and sometimes I have difficulty concentrating." In graduate school, he obtained a prescription for Adderall from a doctor who didn't ask a lot of questions. The drug helped him, especially when his ambitions were relatively low. He recalled, "I had this one paper, on nuclear strategy. The professor didn't look favorably on any kind of creative thinking." On Adderall, he pumped out the paper in an evening. "I just bit my tongue, regurgitated, and got a good-enough grade."

On the other hand, Seltzer recalled that he had taken piracetam to write an essay on "the idea of harmony as a trope in Chinese political discourse"—it was one of the papers he was proudest of. He said, "It was really an intellectual challenge to do. I felt that the piracetam helped me to work within the realm of the abstract, and make the kind of associations that I needed—following this idea of harmony from an ancient religious belief as it was translated throughout the centuries into a very important topic in political discourse."

After a hiatus of several years, Seltzer had recently resumed taking neuroenhancers. In addition to piracetam, he took a stack of supplements that he thought helped his brain functioning: fish oils, five antioxidants, a product called ChocoMind, and a number of others, all available at the health-food store. He was thinking about adding modafinil, but hadn't yet. For breakfast every morning, he concocted a slurry of oatmeal, berries, soy milk, pomegranate juice, flaxseed, almond meal, raw eggs, and protein powder. The goal behind the recipe was efficiency: to rely on "one goop you could eat or drink that would have everything you need nutritionally for your brain and body." He explained, "Taste was the last thing on my mind; I wanted to be able to

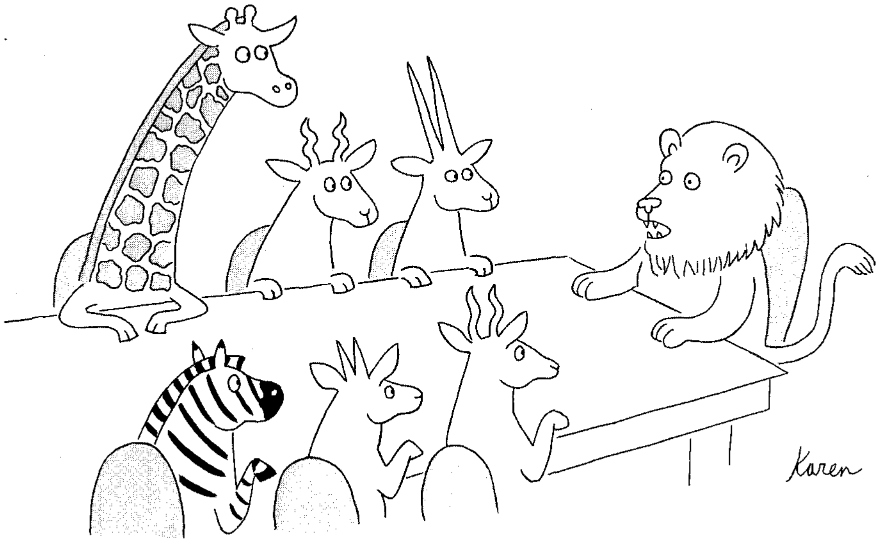

THE FARMER, THE LOG, AND THE LOG'S ATTORNEY
Dunn

keep it down—that was it." (He told me this in the kitchen of his apartment; he lives with a roommate, who walked in while we were talking, listened perplexedly for a moment, then put a frozen pizza in the oven.)

Seltzer's decision to take piracetam was based on his own online reading, which included medical-journal abstracts. He hadn't consulted a doctor. Since settling on a daily regimen of supplements, he had sensed an improvement in his intellectual work and his ability to engage in stimulating conversation. He continued, "I feel I'm better able to articulate my thoughts. I'm sure you've been in the zone—you're having a really exciting debate with somebody, your brain feels alive. I feel that more. But I don't want to say that it's this profound change."

I asked him if piracetam made him feel smarter, or just more alert and confident—a little better equipped to marshal the resources he naturally had. "Maybe," he said. "I'm not sure what being smarter means, entirely. It's a difficult quality to measure. It's the gestalt factor, all these qualities coming together—not only your ability to crunch some numbers, or remember some figures or a sequence of numbers, but also your ability to maintain a certain emotional state that is conducive to productive intellectual work. I do feel I'm more intelligent with the drugs, but I can't give you a number of I.Q. points."

The effects of piracetam on healthy volunteers have been studied even less than those of Adderall or modafinil. Most peer-reviewed studies focus on its effects on dementia, or on people who have suffered a seizure or a concussion. Many of the studies that look at other neurological effects were performed on rats and mice. Piracetam's mechanisms of action are not understood, though it may increase levels of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. In 2008, a committee of the British Academy of Medical Sciences noted that many of the clinical trials of piracetam for dementia were methodologically flawed. Another published review of the available studies of the drug concluded that the evidence "does not support the use of piracetam in the treatment of people with dementia or cognitive impairment," but suggested that further investigation might be warranted. I asked Seltzer if he thought he should wait for scientific ratification of piracetam. He laughed. "I don't want to," he said. "Because it's working."



*"In light of recent events, I'm afraid I'm going to have to eat some of you."*

• •

It makes no sense to ban the use of neuroenhancers. Too many people are already taking them, and the users tend to be educated and privileged people who proceed with just enough caution to avoid getting into trouble. Besides, Anjan Chatterjee is right that there is an apt analogy with plastic surgery. In a consumer society like ours, if people are properly informed about the risks and benefits of neuroenhancers, they can make their own choices about how to alter their minds, just as they can make their own decisions about shaping their bodies.

Still, even if you acknowledge that cosmetic neurology is here to stay, there is something dispiriting about the way the drugs are used—the kind of aspirations they open up, or don't. Jonathan Eisen, an evolutionary biologist at U.C. Davis, is skeptical of what he mockingly calls "brain doping." During a recent conversation, he spoke about colleagues who take neuroenhancers in order to grind out grant proposals. "It's weird to me that people are taking these drugs to write grants," he said. "I mean, if you came up with some really interesting paper that was *spurred* by taking some really interesting drug—magic mushrooms or something—that would make more sense to me. In the end, you're only as good as the ideas you've come up with."

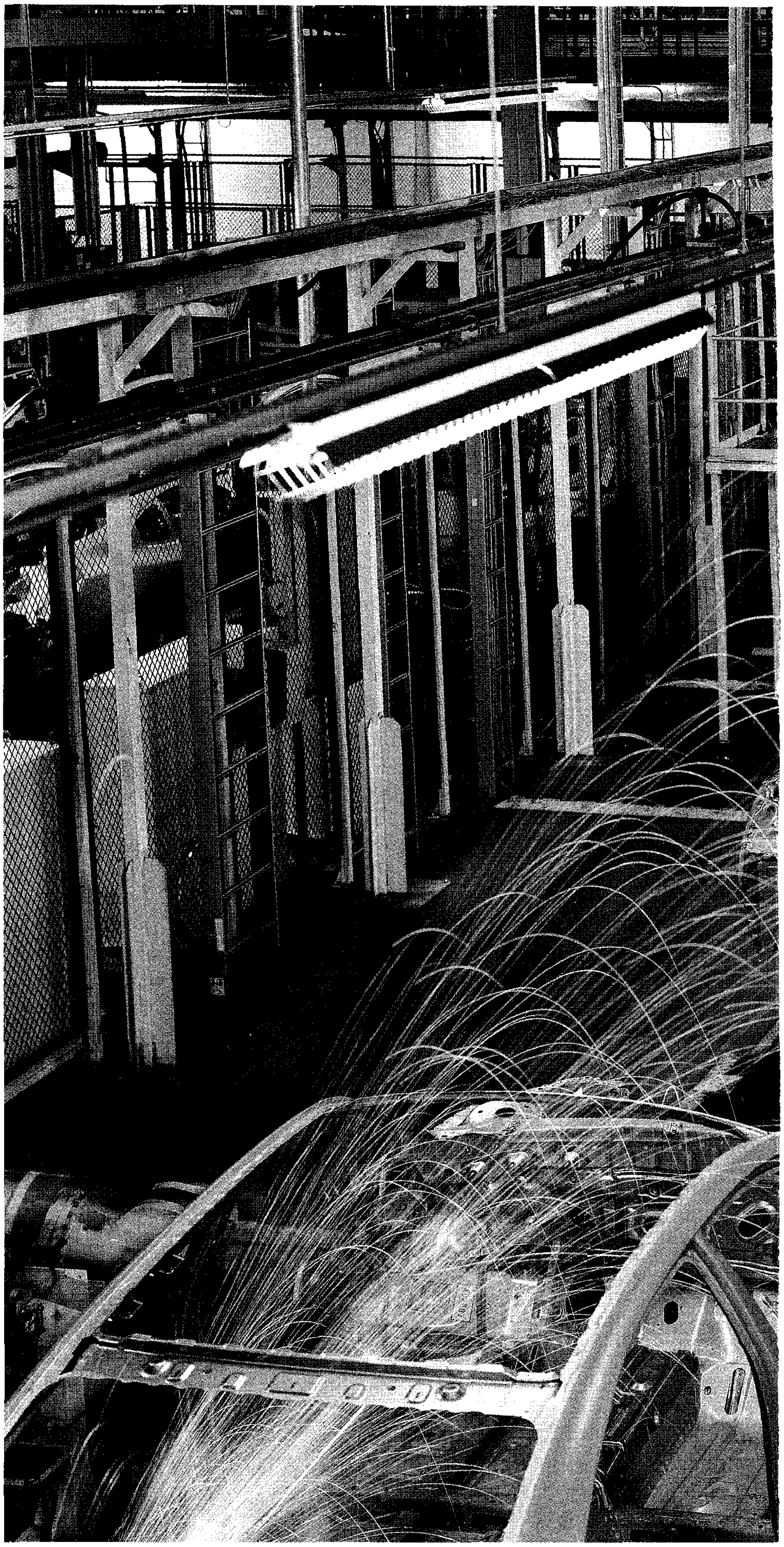
But it's not the mind-expanding sixties anymore. Every era, it seems, has its own defining drug. Neuroenhancers are perfectly suited for the anxiety of white-collar competition in a floundering economy. And they have a synergistic relationship with our multiplying digital technologies: the more gadgets we own, the more distracted we become, and the more we need help in order to focus. The experience that neuroenhancement offers is not, for the most part, about opening the doors of perception, or about breaking the bonds of the self, or about experiencing a surge of genius. It's about squeezing out an extra few hours to finish those sales figures when you'd really rather collapse into bed; getting a B instead of a B-minus on the final exam in a lecture class where you spent half your time texting; cramming for the G.R.E.s at night, because the information-industry job you got after college turned out to be deadening. Neuroenhancers don't offer freedom. Rather, they facilitate a pinched, unromantic, grindingly efficient form of productivity.

This winter, I spoke again with Alex, the Harvard graduate, and found that, after a break of several months, he had gone back to taking Adderall—a small dose every day. He felt that he was learning to use the drug in a more "disciplined" manner. Now, he said, it was less about staying up late to finish work he should have done earlier, and more "about staying focussed on work, which makes me want to work longer hours." What employer would object to that? ♦

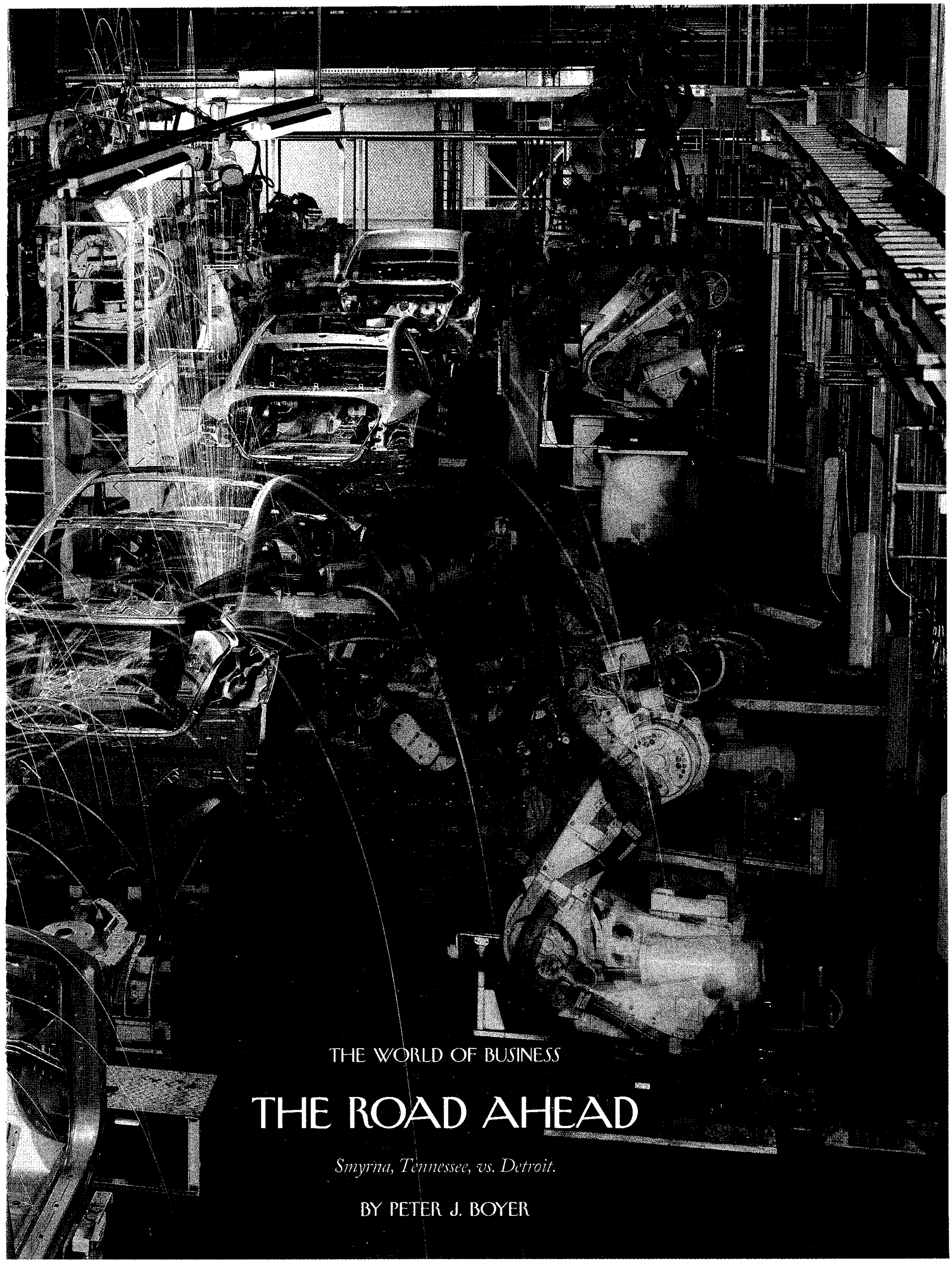
Like many Americans who fought in the Second World War, Sam Ridley, a tank commander in Patton's drive across France, came home with big plans and a heightened sense of destiny. Within a year of returning to Smyrna, Tennessee, Ridley ran for mayor, and won. The town was just a tiny rural whistle-stop on the Louisville and Nashville line, but the war had brought an Army airfield to its outskirts, tripling its population to fifteen hundred. Sensing opportunity, Ridley formed a partnership with his twin brother, Knox, and their childhood buddy Earl Coleman; they pooled their money and built the town's first dry-cleaning shop. As the years passed, the Ridley partnership bought a Ben Franklin five-and-dime, an insurance agency, and, eventually, the local Chevrolet dealership. There wasn't much left that Ridley didn't own, so he began buying up farmland and built Smyrna's first housing developments. Ridley served as mayor for forty years, winning ten terms, often without opposition.

Smyrna prospered, but in 1970, with the Vietnam War winding down, the federal government closed the Air Force base. Other towns were traumatized by such closings, but Ridley insisted that great opportunity lay just ahead. Nashville, twenty-three miles to the north, was undergoing a dramatic growth spurt—the beginning of the Sun Belt ascendancy—and its geographic centrality brought the convergence of six interstate legs within its city limits. The same year that Smyrna lost its airbase, a new section of Interstate 24 was completed, putting Smyrna near the heart of a transportation corridor that reached to all corners of the country. Ridley hustled state and federal money for the construction of a huge cloverleaf interchange, designed for high-volume traffic, joining the interstate to Smyrna. It was, at the time, an interchange to nowhere, but Ridley vowed that Smyrna would someday have a four-lane road to attach to it.

Smyrna's fate, as it turned out, was decided in a boardroom in Tokyo, and by events in the Middle East. Americans were introduced to the reality of an oil crisis in 1973, when the oil-producing Arab states imposed an oil embargo on the U.S. in retaliation for its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Oil prices quadrupled, and American drivers who had been paying thirty-six cents a gallon for gasoline that fall suddenly found themselves pay-



*At first, the Nissan plant produced only pickup trucks, which had fewer components than cars,*



### THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

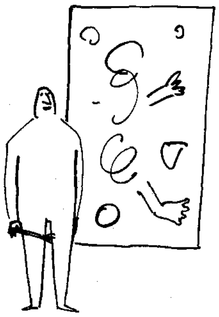
# THE ROAD AHEAD

*Smyrna, Tennessee, vs. Detroit.*

BY PETER J. BOYER

*because the Japanese weren't sure about American workmanship. Photograph by Mitch Epstein.*

ing multiples of that price, and waiting in line to do it. They began to buy the small, fuel-efficient cars being imported from Japan in increasing numbers. Detroit did not undertake a fundamental readjustment in response to the oil crisis, partly because, once the crisis passed, consumers demanded the big, comfortable cars to which they were accustomed. In "The Reckoning," David Halberstam recounted that a Ford executive introduced the company's 1978 line of new cars by proclaiming, "Welcome to the year of the Whopper." But 1978 turned out to be the year of tumult in Iran, leading to revolution and to an even more severe oil crisis. This time, Japanese penetration into the American car market was significant, and permanent. That year, General Motors reached its peak as the world's largest automaker, and never again sold as many cars and trucks.



The proliferation on American roads of Datsuns, Toyotas, and Hondas led to a protectionist impulse in Washington, and by the end of the decade tariffs on Japanese imports seemed imminent. From the Japanese perspective, the surest way to protect its American market was to begin manufacturing its cars in the United States. Nissan Motor Company, Japan's second-largest automaker, announced in 1980 that it would build a new automobile factory here. Nissan had long experience in America with its Datsun brand, having launched a vigorous export strategy in the late nineteen-fifties that made the company, a perennial also-ran to Toyota at home, the first Japanese carmaker to rank among the top ten imports in the U.S. The young executive who had initiated that strategy, Takashi Ishihara, was now the president of the company. But Ishihara undertook the move to American production with trepidation. It was his view (and the common one in Tokyo) that Japanese automobiles sold so well in America not just because they were more fuel-efficient but because they were better cars.

Ishihara had a low opinion of American manufacturing and workmanship. Detroit's management focussed more on short-term profit than on quality, and the antagonistic labor-management relationship, governed by a tangle of burdensome workplace rules, seemed designed to frustrate efficiency. The high rate of absenteeism on the American assembly line was shocking to the Japanese. Ishihara wanted to make cars in America, but he was determined that Nissan would not become an American automaker.

To run the American project, Nissan hired Marvin Runyon, a Ford executive, and Jerry Benefield, another Ford man, as one of Runyon's top assistants. They were considered two of the best manufacturing men in Detroit, and sympathized with the Japanese critique of the American car industry.

Nissan proposed to transplant the Japanese method to the United States. It was a huge gamble—at five hundred million dollars, it would be the largest Japanese investment ever in this country. The critical question was where to situate the new plant: there would need to be proximity to rail and interstate connections; the site would be rural, away from the social tumults of the industrial cities; there would need to be a pool of potential workers who knew little about the American system of producing cars, and the unionism that came with it; and there had to be local civic leadership that could be relied upon to get things done. The U.S. was in a deep recession, and the governors of several states aggressively campaigned for the Nissan project. Smyrna emerged as the obvious choice.

The Japanese bought eight hundred and fifty acres of land at the edge of town (some of it from Ridley), and Ridley and the Tennessee officials provided everything Nissan asked for, including a rail spur to the L. & N. line, water and waste systems, and new roadways—one of them (the Sam Ridley Parkway) connecting to the I-24 interchange. The factory that Nissan built was three million square feet under one roof, stretching for several blocks—it would become the largest auto plant in the country, and would eventually have the capacity to produce half a million automobiles a year, but when production started, on June 16, 1983, Nissan began cautiously, producing only pickup trucks. Ishihara still wasn't sure about American workmanship. "You couldn't blame him," Jerry Benefield recalls. "The quality of their finished product was a good bit higher than the domestic automakers'. That's why we started with the pickup truck—it had fewer components."

The plant began to produce passenger cars in its third year and soon became profitable, and through the nineteen-eighties it consistently ranked as the most productive auto plant in the United States. Salaries were lower than those in Detroit, but many Southern workers, who had never had high-paying jobs, were attracted by Nissan's health benefits and pension plan. Every employee had the right to lease a new car from the company at a discount.

Smyrna attracted workers like Daren Shanks, who came from the farm town of Baxter, Tennessee. "I'd heard that it was a good place to work—they never laid off," he says. He remembers driving to Smyrna and, as he looked for the entrance gate, driving past two and then three traffic signals: "I'm going through the third red light and I'm still goin' past it. It was unbelievable." Shanks waited a year for the job after applying, and was glad to get it, working on the engine line. "It's given me the opportunity to do stuff for my kids that I'd never have had the opportunity to do," he said, like send them to college. "My oldest child majored in biochemistry." The job, he said, "gave my family a way of life that we probably wouldn't have had otherwise. Every year, we got a new lease car."

Other foreign automakers began to emulate Nissan's success, and a new Auto Belt emerged in America—centered in the South, stretching from Texas to South Carolina. Michigan has lost more than eighty-three thousand automobile-manufacturing jobs in the last fifteen years, but the South has gained that many auto jobs and more.

The lasting significance of the Smyrna venture became clear last fall, when General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler went to Washington to seek money for the industry's survival. Opposition to a Detroit bailout came most forcefully from a group of representatives from those states which had foreign-owned auto plants—"transplants," as they are now universally called.

The leader of this group was Senator Bob Corker, a Republican from Tennessee; his critics sometimes refer to him as "the Senator from Nissan." In two Senate hearings, and in private meetings with the Detroit executives, Corker framed their plight in clear and devastating terms: the Big Three were failing because of their own inefficiencies, and the success of the transplant factories proved it. The Senate rejected the bailout plan in December, and when the Bush Administration stepped in with a last-minute bridge loan to G.M. and Chrysler it was the Senator from Nissan who largely shaped its terms. If the domestic auto industry wanted taxpayer money, it would have to fundamentally restructure itself, reduce its debt, and bring its labor costs in line with those of the transplants. If Detroit was to survive, Corker was saying, it would have to become more like Smyrna.

When the chief executives of General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler first appeared before Congress, in November, they had reason to hope that their pleas for rescue would be met with sympathy. Bailout backlash had not yet spiralled into populist rage, and the automakers' plight was indisputably dire. General Motors, burning through more than a billion dollars a month, had just filed notice with the Securities and Exchange Commission that insolvency was imminent. Ford and Chrysler were also facing hard times. Unlike American International Group, which had sought federal financial assistance since September and left with about a hundred and seventy billion dollars in aid, the automakers had some claim on national sentiment. Few people (including some members of Congress) even knew what business A.I.G. was in, but everyone had once loved an American car. The Big Three executives said they needed twenty-five billion, a relative bargain.

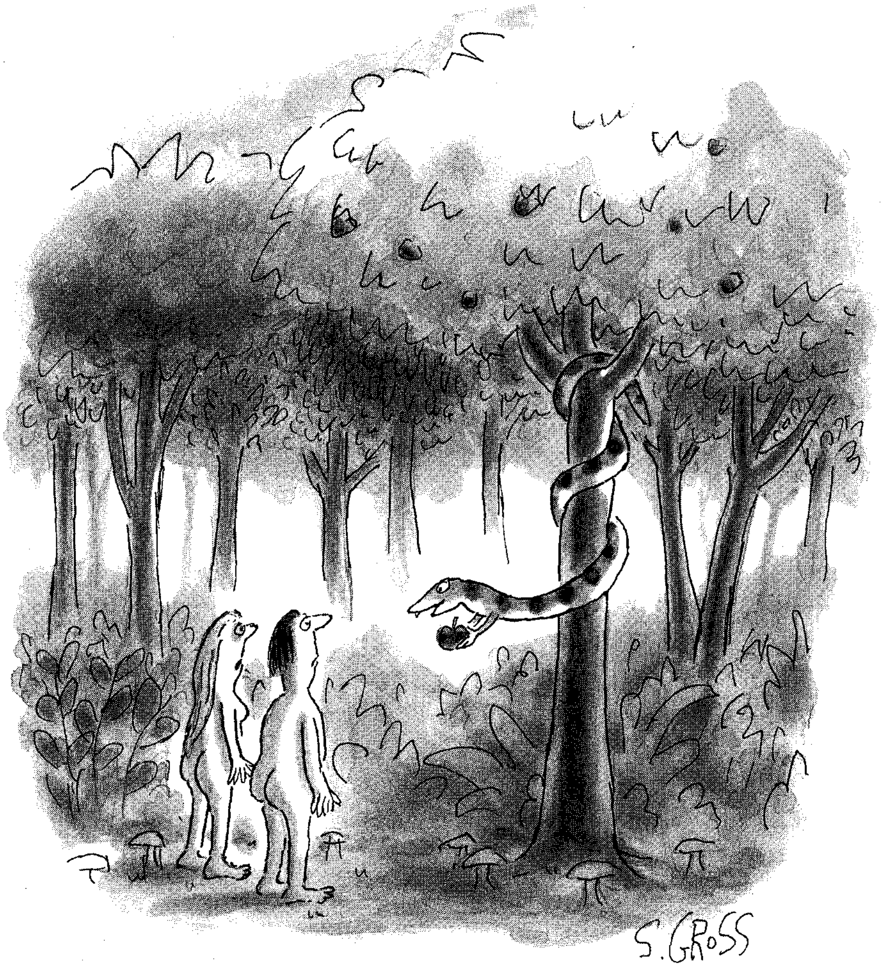
The automakers, joined by the head of the United Auto Workers, Ron Gettelfinger, met first with the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, chaired by Senator Christopher Dodd. Rick Wagoner, G.M.'s chairman and C.E.O., in his opening statement, blamed the global economic meltdown for his company's crisis, and laid out what amounted to a "too big to fail" case for a G.M. bailout. "This is about much more than just Detroit," he said. "It's about saving the U.S. economy from a catastrophic collapse." Almost as an aside, Wagoner mentioned that G.M. had ninety-six thousand employees, and provided medical coverage for a million people. Wagoner meant to suggest his company's indispensability, but the health-care statistic—more than ten beneficiaries for every active worker—indicated a company with deep underlying structural problems.

Those problems became the focus of the hearing, with Senator Corker leading the witnesses into testimony that illuminated some of Detroit's more egregious inefficiencies. At one point, striking a tone of incredulity, Corker said that he had heard that the auto companies sometimes kept their factories in production even when there was no demand for cars, because union agreements make it too expensive to idle a plant. Corker looked at Robert Nardelli, the chairman and C.E.O. of Chrysler, and asked if that was true.

Nardelli, his hand to his head, answered, "There is a contractual obligation that when we have to idle a facility that we do have to continue to pay wages at about ninety-five per cent."

"That seems kind of problematic to me, I mean, just on the surface," Corker replied. "And it seems to me that you're asking us for twenty-five billion dollars to support a clause that in no other business in this country would be tolerated."

The exchange exposed the industry's predicament: the automakers and their workers were mired in arrangements made long ago that had ultimately rendered their businesses untenable. The situation that Corker referred to was the industry's infamous "jobs bank" program, which dated back to an agreement that G.M. had made with its workers in 1984. At the time, Nissan's Smyrna plant was entering its second year of production, and Honda had recently added an auto plant to its motorcycle operation in Marysville, Ohio. G.M. executives, responding to the competitive threat, wanted to modernize some of their operations with robotics and other efficiencies. The U.A.W., sensing potential job losses, won a contract provision designed to dis-



*"This is the tree of knowledge. We also have a tree of athletic ability and a tree if you want to be a good dancer."*

*"In high school, I was quite the star in metal shop."*

• •

courage layoffs: displaced workers were shifted to a jobs bank, drawing full benefits and nearly full pay. They were not obliged to seek other jobs, and, as the Detroit *News* reported a few years ago, many of them spent their days working on crossword puzzles at the local union hall. Such extravagant concessions seemed tolerable when G.M. still dominated the marketplace, and wished to avoid the disruption of a labor dispute. (Ford and Chrysler, in the Detroit tradition, also instituted the jobs-bank program, which endured until last year.) The jobs-bank plan made less sense as Detroit's share of the market shrank.

Sometimes, instead of paying employees not to work, a company kept its workers on the job, producing cars that didn't need to be built. This added to a chronic problem of overcapacity, which, in turn, encouraged a reliance on deep pricing discounts and marketing gimmicks (such as zero-per-cent financing) that moved inventory but lost money.

To an outsider, such arrangements sounded like managerial incompetence, an impression that the witnesses from Detroit (prodded by Corker) did little to dispel. When Corker asked the executives about their plans for the twenty-five billion dollars, they conceded that they didn't really have specific plans; they'd just decided to divvy up the money according to the market share of each company. "I was, in some ways, embarrassed for them," Corker later said on the Senate floor.

The next day, Brian Ross, of ABC News, reported that the three automobile executives had flown to Washington on private jets ("Even first class isn't good enough for those three"). The automakers found themselves pleading for survival in an environment that seemed inclined to let them fail. Senator Robert Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey, seemed nearly as skeptical as Corker, insisting, "They have to show a plan that shows that the twenty-five billion gets them to the point of viability. They have to show us a plan of how they're going to restructure their industry." The Washington *Post* wrote in an editorial, "The downfall of the American auto industry is indeed a tragedy, but the automakers and the United Auto Workers have only themselves to blame for much of it." The industry chiefs were mocked on "Saturday Night Live."

The hostility partly reflected the degree to which Detroit's natural constituency has fractured. The Democratic Party's ideological center of gravity had shifted from the blue-collar values of the industrial Midwest to the environmentalist imperatives of affluent suburbia and the West. In "An Inconvenient Truth," Al Gore excoriated Detroit for making gas-guzzlers. In the years since, the sport-utility vehicle has become a symbol, to some, of Detroit's lack of corporate virtue. (In 2003, the Sierra Club urged the Internal Revenue Service to audit S.U.V. owners who claimed to use their cars for business purposes.)

The rise of the S.U.V. represented another of Detroit's fundamental dilemmas. The vehicle came into being as an indirect consequence of a government policy that was partly meant to accommodate environmental concerns. The reform-minded Congress of 1975, animated by the activist spirit of the so-called "Watergate class" of new, young Democratic members, had passed a law imposing emissions and fuel-efficiency standards on automobiles. Vehicles built on truck beds were governed by lower standards, on the assumption that they would be used in work, and would bear heavier loads. The American auto industry exploited the loophole by ramping up production of big passenger vehicles that sat on truck beds. The minivan evolved into the extended-cab pickup trucks and S.U.V.s that proliferated during the next two decades.

The American public loved the big vehicles, which were affordable because national energy policy made low gasoline prices a priority. The S.U.V.s and trucks were hugely profitable for the manufacturers, offsetting losses incurred partly because of labor-related costs. Detroit's dependence on these vehicles, though, was risky, as became clear last year when fuel prices rose steeply and the industry effectively crashed.

When Nissan broke ground on its Smyrna plant, in February, 1981, organized-labor groups showed up at the site in force, protesting the non-union project. A local labor leader, Jim Turner, predicted that it was just a matter of time before reality set in. "We're just waiting for those who have never worked in an auto plant to find out what an assembly line is and what it does to you," he said. "People who are critical of autoworkers have never worked a moving assembly line day in and day out, year after year."

Turner and the others were proved wrong. The U.A.W. twice tried to organize the Smyrna plant, but workers turned them down by sizable margins. A third attempt was abandoned before it reached a vote. "We knew the people," Jerry Benefield, who is from Georgia, says. "They didn't have any preconceived notions about how you build automobiles, because *none of them* had ever done it."

Nissan didn't match the Big Three factories in wages, but the jobs paid well for the region. Workers were given a decent pension. "It was much less than the Big Three," Benefield says, "but we also had a 401(k) plan, which encouraged people to join by matching a certain percentage of what they put in, and then they could put more in." Employees participated in paying for their medical coverage. "We thought it was fair that they pay for part of their medical benefit," Benefield says. "We thought it was smart. We thought that it would keep them from misusing it if they realized that if the price of medical care went up the price that they participated in would go up." Nissan management also promised the workers that the company would avoid layoffs, even in slumps.

"We did everything we could possibly do to keep it from being a situation of them and us," Benefield says. "We wanted everybody to be on the same team, and we designed all of our policies to support that." Workers found that for the most part the talk was backed by deed. Management parked in the same lot as the hourly workers, ate in the same cafeteria, and used the same rest-room facilities. Every employee, from Runyon down, was issued a Nissan uniform. Workers were encouraged to bring their complaints and their ideas for improving the cars directly to the top management. Line workers, called technicians, learned several jobs, allowing them to shift duties several times in a day—alleviating the numbing boredom of assembly-line work. They were encouraged by the company to pursue upward mobility. The guiding philosophy in the Nissan plan, and in Japanese manufacturing generally, was *kaizen*—continuous improvement—and the workers bought in.

Nissan in Smyrna—and, later, Toyota in Kentucky, and all the other transplants—was able to build flexibility into the system. In Detroit, any move toward flexibility had to be negotiated with the union, usually at the price of taking on some other inefficiency. This wasn't because management was inept, or because labor was greedy, but because of the circumstances in which the American auto industry had developed.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that in 1925 the average American autoworker had become three times more productive since the start of the First World War. In a 1927 article noting that development, and American industrial dominion generally, the *Times* credited the theories of Frederick W. Taylor, an efficiency expert with surpassing influence among his audience of American industrialists. Taylor developed a theory he called Scientific Management. Its central tenet was that, to achieve the greatest efficiency, "it is absolutely necessary for every man in an organization to become one of a train of gear wheels." Taylor's "science" was given its fullest application by Henry Ford, who measured his workers' movements on the assembly line with a stopwatch. Two years after the *Times* article praising Taylor's methods, the stock market crashed. In the New Deal era, the condition of the workingman was accorded more sympathy, and in 1935 Congress passed the Wagner Act, creating the National Labor Relations Board, and granting workers the right to unionize, to bargain collectively, and to strike.

Two years later, the newly organized United Auto Workers occupied a General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan, and held it for forty-four days, effectively shutting down G.M. operations across the country. The world's largest and richest company yielded to its workers, giving the union the sole right to represent G.M. workers. The new union didn't reject the premise of workers as mere cogs in the company machine—the Japanese teamwork model wasn't even imagined—but, on the contrary, assumed that characterization as its bargaining premise. The union's view was that working an assembly line was brute work; in exchange for doing it, workers demanded better wages and benefits, and, especially, time away from the job. Company and labor were thereafter bound in a relationship that was inherently antagonistic, and largely remains so today.

Nowhere was this mutualism more starkly cast than in Flint, where General Motors was founded, and the U.A.W. gained its defining victory. For generations, the labor-management duopoly flourished spectacularly, to the benefit of company and worker alike. In 1968, after graduating from Flint's Kearsley High School, a young man named Ed McClain rode his Harley-Davidson down to G.M.'s A.C. Spark Plug factory on the Dort Highway and applied for a job. When he got home that afternoon, there was a message waiting, informing him that he'd been hired. He was eighteen, and he worked at A.C. for the next thirty years, before retiring with full benefits. "You could walk in off the street and get a job back then," McClain recently recalled, reciting the names of G.M. factories that had once operated at full force in Flint: Fisher One (the body plant that had been the scene of the 1937 strike); Fisher Two; the Ternstedt body-parts plant; four Chevrolet plants; the Grand Blanc plant; and the massive complex that produced Buicks. McClain's father had worked at Buick, a two-hundred-and-thirty-five-acre sprawl that at its peak employed eighty thousand workers.

"It was a great job, it was a great time," McClain says. "And this is a fact—the auto industry, along with the U.A.W., because of progressive gains in wages and benefits and taking care of people the way even God would have taken care of his people, created middle-class America."

Workers like McClain earned enough to send their children to college, and to buy a vacation home, and perhaps a pleasure boat—with five weeks off to enjoy it. The week of July 4th was dubbed Freedom Week, and employees worked only part time. Their health benefits were top-tier, and a nationwide legal-services network provided workers with counsel on matters ranging from divorce to debt collection.

When, by the nineteen-eighties, G.M. began to react to foreign competition, its response, constrained partly by labor obligations, was slow, and ultimately ineffective. The Buick factories were organized into a Buick City complex in 1984; fifteen years later, the operation was shut down. That was what happened to most of Flint's auto factories, and it is difficult now to imagine the town as the vibrant industrial community it was in McClain's youth. "They just knocked down A.C. Spark Plug to the ground," he says. "Fisher One does not exist anymore. Ternstedt was knocked down to the ground. Buick is knocked down to the ground, two-thirds of it. Just nothing but miles and acres of land, vacant."

When McClain's stepson graduated from high school, he took a job at Mc-

Donald's. "That's all there is around here," McClain says. "Right now, you wanna know what's going on with the middle class? They've been pillaged. Their jobs have been outsourced." McClain, who became a union leader at his plant, is inclined to blame corporate management for what happened in Flint. When I spoke with him, there were rumors that Rick Wagoner might be dismissed as G.M.'s C.E.O. "I heard Barack Obama told Wagoner, 'Get out, we don't even need C.E.O.s like you.' And I thought, This guy Obama knows what's going on."

But McClain also knows that the fate of the American automakers was likely decided when the first foreign-owned plants began producing cars in the U.S. "George Washington would roll over in his grave and call it treason for letting foreigners come in here and take away what we had built," he says. "We taught 'em everything they know. Why would anybody in this country put a foreign entity over ourself first? It's all got to do with world order. It's a setup."

The fact that the Big Three couldn't run a factory the way Nissan did in Smyrna partly explains why, in the current crash of auto sales, Detroit finds itself in starkly more dire condition than the transplants. Nissan's sales have slumped, but it remains true to its promise of avoiding layoffs in Smyrna, instead putting its workers on a shorter week. Across town, the former Ridley Chevrolet dealership has filed for bankruptcy.

The auto executives left Washington in November without their bailout, and returned two weeks later a chastened group. General Motors placed a full-page ad in *Automotive News*, confessing to a series of strategic mistakes, apologizing for violating consumer trust with inferior products and for biasing "our product mix toward pickup trucks and SUVs." The chief executives all drove to Washington, arriving at the Capitol in hybrid vehicles. Ford, whose president and C.E.O., Alan Mulally, had sold off a number of subsidiaries in recent years and effectively mortgaged the company to raise cash, decided that it could forgo the immediate embarrassment of asking for government money, but requested a government credit line of nine billion dollars. The G.M. and Chrysler executives brought detailed rescue plans.

Some Senate Republicans still believed that G.M. and Chrysler should be allowed to fail, but Corker was no longer among them. A millionaire businessman and former mayor of Chattanooga, he had come to the Senate, in 2007, under circumstances that were not propitious. He had survived a close and contentious campaign against Harold Ford, Jr., who hoped to become the first African-American elected to the Senate from Tennessee. Toward the end of the campaign, an ad produced by the Republican National Committee mocked Ford as being out of touch with Tennessee values. It included an actress playing a blond bimbo, saying, "I met Harold at the Playboy party!" and whispering, with a wink, "Harold, call me." Corker renounced the ad, but it sullied his victory over Ford.

Corker was the only new Republican to enter the Senate in 2007, which was not a good year to be a Republican freshman. With Democrats in control, Corker found himself at the bottom of the Senate food chain, and after a few weeks he was miserable and wondering why he'd run. He called a meeting of his staff, and declared that if he wasn't going to have fun he would at least be heeded. He determined to become a Senate overachiever, making his way onto a committee—banking—where a willingness to work hard might allow him to make his mark. The financial collapse moved Dodd's banking committee, along with Corker, to Washington's center stage.

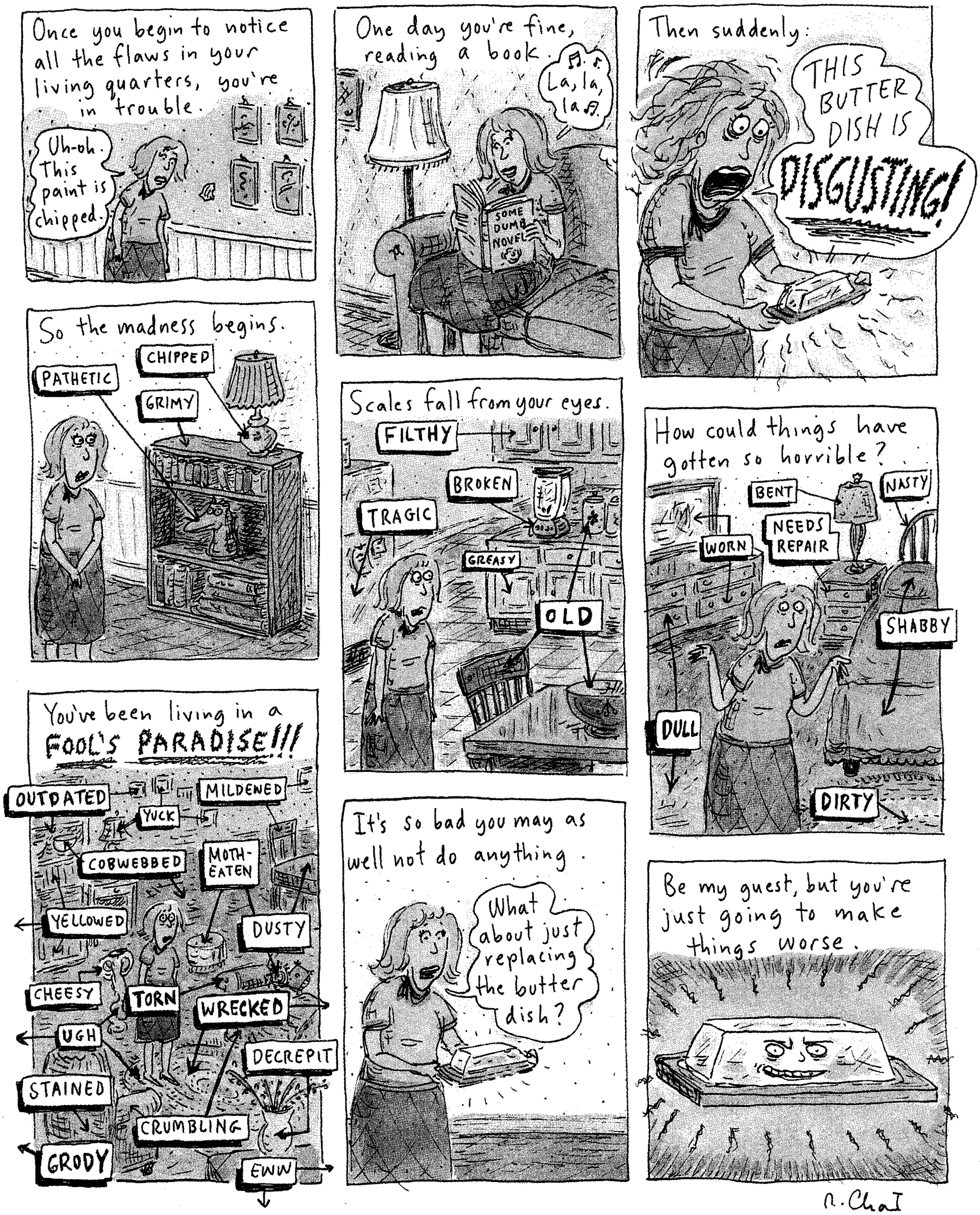
When the automakers first came to Washington, the Southern Auto Belt senators, including Corker, had generally agreed about the proposed bailout. For reasons of ideology (let the marketplace rule) and self-interest (the U.A.W. had donated heavily to their opponents), they were inclined to let Detroit fail. Corker's voice had been the most prominent in the first round of hearings, but when they ended he felt he still didn't know enough to advocate for bankruptcy. On December 1st, the beginning of the week that the second round of hearings was scheduled to be held, Corker flew to New York for a series of meetings with auto-industry analysts and G.M. bondholders. Among them was James B. Lee, Jr., the vice-chairman of J. P. Morgan Chase. "I explained to Bob that you can get pretty clinical talking about bankruptcy, and you sort of do it in almost a theoretical way, even though you're talking about a really powerful event, and then, when it actually happens, it's pretty devastating," Lee recalls. "I think the Lehman Brothers thing sort of reminded us all of that, that if you bankrupt a big iconic company that touches a lot of parts of the economy you'd better be ready for it."

"The auto supply chain was incredibly fragile," Corker said. "And while Chapter 11 may have been the best thing for G.M., many of these companies were not going to make it." Also, he said, "there was the whole issue of warranties, which I think was a valid argument. Were people going to buy a car from G.M. when they knew it was bankrupt?"

When Corker returned to Washington, he began to work out an alternative to bankruptcy. G.M.'s most urgent problem was a crushing debt burden, much of it from its obligations to worker-benefit programs. The union workers had been promised lifetime pensions and full health coverage, and, after a 1970 strike, they were also granted the option of retiring after thirty years on the job. That meant that a worker who joined the company at eighteen—as Ed McClain did—could retire at forty-eight, and collect benefits for more years than he'd spent as an active employee. A hundred-year-old company like G.M. has a lot of retirees, and the labor costs of a G.M. vehicle were roughly fifteen hundred dollars more than what it cost to produce a car in the transplant factories. In 2007, the U.A.W. allowed the automakers to move retiree health-care obligations off the books as an ongoing cost and into a union-run trust, the Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association (VEBA), which would pay retiree health benefits. The three automakers had to fund the bulk of a sixty-billion-dollar trust, with G.M. owing the largest amount; its next installment, of $7.6 billion, is due next year.

After the second round of hearings, the Bush White House, not wishing to add the auto industry's demise to its chapter in history, worked with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to devise a short-term fix. The House approved a fourteen-billion-dollar bridge loan to Chrysler and G.M., but the bill went nowhere in the Senate. When Bush's chief of staff, Joshua Bolten, tried to sell Republican senators on the measure, he was laughed out of the room. "It was the most pitiful presentation I've

# SPRING CLEANING


Once you begin to notice all the flaws in your living quarters, you're in trouble.
Uh-oh. This paint is chipped.
One day you're fine, reading a book.
La, la, la
SOME DUMB NOVEL
Then suddenly:
THIS BUTTER DISH IS DISGUSTING!
So the madness begins.
PATHETIC
CHIPPED
GRIMY
Scales fall from your eyes.
FILTHY
BROKEN
TRAGIC
GREASY
OLD
How could things have gotten so horrible?
BENT
NASTY
WORN
NEEDS REPAIR
SHABBY
DULL
DIRTY
You've been living in a FOOL'S PARADISE!!!
OUTDATED
MILDEWED
YUCK
COBWEBBED
MOTH-EATEN
YELLOWED
DUSTY
CHEESY
TORN
WRECKED
UGH
DECREPIT
STAINED
CRUMBLING
GRODY
EWW
It's so bad you may as well not do anything.
What about just replacing the butter dish?
Be my guest, but you're just going to make things worse.
R. Chast

ever seen," Corker recalled. "If they had six votes when they came in, they had three when they left."

Addressing the Republican caucus, Corker explained that the House bill required no specific action on the part of the carmakers to undertake a fundamental restructuring. He outlined his own plan: the union would be asked to accept half of its VEBA payment in stock, rather than cash, and the bondholders would be asked to accept a "debt for equity" swap, accepting thirty-three cents on the dollar for their bonds in exchange for G.M. stock. The companies and the union would also have to agree to drastically alter work rules and wage structure, making them competitive with the transplant companies by the end of 2009.

The Republican leadership asked Corker to introduce his plan as an amendment that would supersede the House bill, and Corker and Dodd began frantic negotiations with the union, representatives of the bondholders, and the automakers. Corker says that the union agreed to accept stock for cash for its VEBA trust, and key bondholders indicated that they would accept an equity swap. Alan Reuther, the U.A.W.'s Washington lobbyist, agreed to put his workers on a par with those of the transplants, but refused to commit to the 2009 deadline. The Republicans wouldn't support the bailout without that timeline in place, and the Corker amendment was shelved. The House proposal was debated that night, and it, too, went nowhere.

A week later, Bush announced that the Treasury Department would lend G.M. and Chrysler $17.4 billion, on terms that generally accorded with Corker's plan. "Look, I got all your stuff in there," Bush told Corker in a telephone call that day. In exchange for the loan, to be paid in installments, the government required G.M. and Chrysler to achieve the VEBA and bondholder debt reductions, and to have a plan by March 31st to bring costs in line with those of Nissan, Toyota, and Honda.

When Barack Obama took the oath of office, he found himself overseeing the biggest industrial restructuring in history, largely on Corker's terms. "Obama has a tremendous opportunity," Corker said. "I think this is one of those defining moments for him." It was not an opportunity that Obama welcomed. "The only thing less popular than putting money into banks," the President noted in a "60 Minutes" interview, "is putting money into the auto industry."

## SKETCH FOR A NOVEL

Chapter minus two hundred and fifty
in which the author pays (and pays for it,
as always) a visit to one of the lost: I

dropped by the dark house with no furniture,
knocked, and was introduced to her mother,
a woman much younger than she was

and for obscure reasons known only to
no one had kept her from childhood on
locked in the oven, &c. At this time

they were living together or, hard to say,
dying, possibly from a mystery
condition which fuelled and quite vivified

their blunt if obsessively honed and
devotedly mutual hatred
and hissing contempt: classic case of

In the weeks following the election, Obama and his team were focussed on matters other than the auto industry. There had been talk of the appointment of a "car czar," and speculation that the role would be filled by the investment banker Steven Rattner; but the Inauguration came and went, and nearly a month later no appointment had been made. (The hesitation might have been explained last week, when news reports revealed that Rattner's firm, the Quadrangle Group, is the subject of an ongoing Securities and Exchange Commission inquiry related to New York's pension fund, and that the Administration had been aware of the probe.) G.M., meanwhile, with relatively little guidance from Washington as it formulated restructuring plans to accommodate the terms of its loan, turned for guidance to Bush holdovers in the Treasury Department.

"We have been dealing directly with Treasury," Fritz Henderson, who was then G.M.'s No. 2, told me. "I wouldn't say we are in touch with Mr. Rattner at all."

Henderson grew up in the auto business. His father worked for G.M. for thirty-nine years, selling Buicks. "My first car was a 1969 Buick Skylark, with a 350, two barrel, which I absolutely loved," he said. "That was my car in college. It was used, sixty-three thousand miles." Henderson was lucky with that car—G.M. was about to enter a period in which it alienated much of a generation of car buyers with automobiles that were shoddily made and aesthetically wanting. "We saw some less than noble efforts," Henderson said.

G.M. has since dramatically improved its product line, but now faces challenges far more daunting than workmanship and aesthetics. There is greater competition in a shrunken marketplace. "Nonetheless," Henderson went on, "our job is to maximize what we can get out of those markets"—even while burdened with legacy costs. "There is nothing I can do about the past," Henderson said, and added, "We invested more than a hundred billion dollars, over a fifteen-year period, to provide resources for both U.S. pension funds and U.S. post-retirement health care. That is a staggering number. And the burden of that, basically, has been borne by our balance sheet. If you say, Where did the resources go?, they went to make sure that we funded our benefits in a way that met our obligations. That's O.K., but it means those resources weren't invested elsewhere, or they weren't provided as a store of value in the balance sheet,

the weapon lying down with the wound?
From the first I had no problem picturing
(and would have preferred to eat decaying

fish and live, rained on, under a bridge)
what would happen if harm came to one of them,
should indeed anything this side of murder

slash suicide occur, although if that did
it was anyone's guess which event would
come first. In a flash you could see it:

all hostilities concluded, and their own
miniature World War III's aftermath,
and the all-out final progressive and

uninterrupted commercial-free
stone-cold muttering psychosis awaiting
lone survivor of this conflict, the end.

—*Franz Wright*

or didn't provide liquidity in the balance sheet for us to make investments or for us to withstand a moment like this."

The White House let it be known on February 16th that, instead of a car czar, Obama would appoint an auto-industry task force, reporting to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner. The next day, G.M. and Chrysler declared that they would need another twenty-three billion dollars between them to survive.

The economist Mark Zandi had warned in a congressional hearing in December that a bailout of the auto industry ultimately could reach a hundred and twenty-five billion dollars. There was no support for an open-ended bailout, and Obama needed to reserve political capital for his economic program. But the autoworkers and other unions had helped elect him (and had ponied up more than fifty million dollars for his campaign). In any case, he felt he couldn't afford to let the industry go under.

Obama's creation of the task force offered an elegant solution. He eventually put Rattner on it, naming him senior adviser to Geithner, but his first appointment to the group, with stature equal to Rattner's, was an adviser to the United Steelworkers Union, Ron Bloom. The naming of Bloom comforted labor and signalled that a turnaround of the failed American auto industry might actually be possible. It had happened in steel, and Bloom had been part of it.

Bloom, like Rattner, spent his early career at Lazard Frères, and went on to make millions on Wall Street in investment banking. Bloom, though, had come to Wall Street, and eventually left it, partly in pursuit of social justice. He had grown up in New York and Philadelphia, in a household whose conversation tended toward progressive politics.

After graduating from Wesleyan University in 1977, Bloom worked for the Service Employees International Union, where he realized that labor was badly overmatched in highly complex negotiations with corporate interests. He enrolled in Harvard Business School, where he read about a group of steelworkers from Weirton, West Virginia, who came to New York in 1983 desperately seeking money to buy their mill, Weirton Steel, which faced a shutdown. After several rejections by the big investment houses, the workers found someone at Lazard Frères, Eugene Keilin, who agreed to take on their project.

A year later, they owned the company, in what was at the time the biggest employee stock-ownership plan ever achieved. The workers had their mill, and Lazard made a killing on fees. In 1985, Bloom joined Lazard, where he worked closely with Keilin, and five years later they established their own boutique investment-banking house, specializing in union-driven restructurings. It was a lucrative niche, and Bloom's stature on Wall Street, and in labor circles, grew. "Ron understands finance better than anybody I've ever met," Michael Psaros, who worked with Keilin and Bloom, and is a managing partner of their successor firm, says. "Finance is what investment bankers do. That's the easy part. Ron understands mergers and acquisitions better than anybody I've met, but that's the easy part, too. The magic is to figure out how to turn around underperforming, highly distressed, and bankrupt manufacturing and industrial companies."

Then, in November, 1996, Bloom told his colleagues he was going to work for the United Steelworkers Union, as a special adviser to its president. "I'm very fortunate in life," Bloom told his partners. "I got to start my own firm, I've done what I loved. But I can help labor more from the inside." It was a secular version of finding God and entering a monastery, but Psaros says he was not shocked. "I have never met anybody less motivated by money than Ron. It's fundamentally not important to him."

Bloom joined the steelworkers just as iconic companies like Bethlehem Steel, shaped by practices from another century, were becoming fatally burdened by legacy costs from labor benefits they could no longer afford. Bethlehem declared bankruptcy in October, 2001; many other companies (including Weirton) came tumbling after, and the industry essentially collapsed. Bethlehem and several others were bought out of bankruptcy by the investor Wilbur L. Ross, Jr., and were merged into the International Steel Group. With Bloom's active participation, Ross restructured the companies after they had been freed by bankruptcy of their obligations (including pensions and other benefits due workers); his new operation had a much leaner work force and shed many of the old work rules and jurisdictions. The result was a more efficient steel industry that was soon turning a profit. Ross sold International Steel Group in 2005, making billions on the turnaround; the steelworkers got a revived industry, staffed by union labor.

Bloom is not dewy-eyed about the hard-won benefits that get tossed aside at such restructurings. By the time he arrives at the table, the business has failed, and he is willing to acknowledge labor's role in the failure. His talent lies in helping to insure that labor is not asked to accept more than its fair share of sacrifice. "The term of art that was invented by the labor unions, and that we always use, is 'equality of sacrifice,'" Psaros says.

Bloom described his negotiating philosophy more graphically in a 2006 speech. "We are big believers in dentist-chair bargaining," he told a gathering of insolvency lawyers and accountants. "For those of you not familiar with this approach, it is inspired by the story of the man who walks into his dentist's office, grabs the dentist by the balls, and says, 'Now, let's not hurt each other.'"

A turnaround like the one achieved in steel is more easily accomplished in a formal bankruptcy proceeding, in which the failed company's liabilities are largely flushed away. But that option is problematic for the auto industry. The auto supply chain, though bolstered by a five-billion-dollar federal loan announced this month, remains fragile, and the repercussions of a free-fall bankruptcy in a bleak economy could be calamitous. That's why most involved parties, from the union to Corker and the President, hoped somehow to keep G.M. out of Chapter 11.

The President's task force had to convince labor, capital, and management that the process they were entering was bankruptcy by another name. Bloom's characteristic approach, Psaros says, is to begin with a cold-blooded reality check. "It starts with confronting the parties with the reality and the facts," he says. "'This business failed. You cannot deny that the business has failed.' And then you present the numbers. The great thing about math is it's objectively correct and does not lie."

In late February, Bloom and Rattner began studying the industry, and what they learned was sobering. They learned, as just one example, that G.M.'s dealership-distribution system is hopelessly out of proportion. Honda has thirteen hundred dealerships in the U.S., and Toyota—G.M.'s chief rival—has about fifteen hundred. G.M. has more than six thousand dealers, who are protected by state franchise laws. It will cost the company billions of dollars just to reach parity with the Japanese-owned companies.

Throughout March, Rattner, Bloom, and their task force met with financial analysts, labor leaders, car dealers, academics, and company management. The picture that emerged was of an industry that could be saved only by the most draconian means.

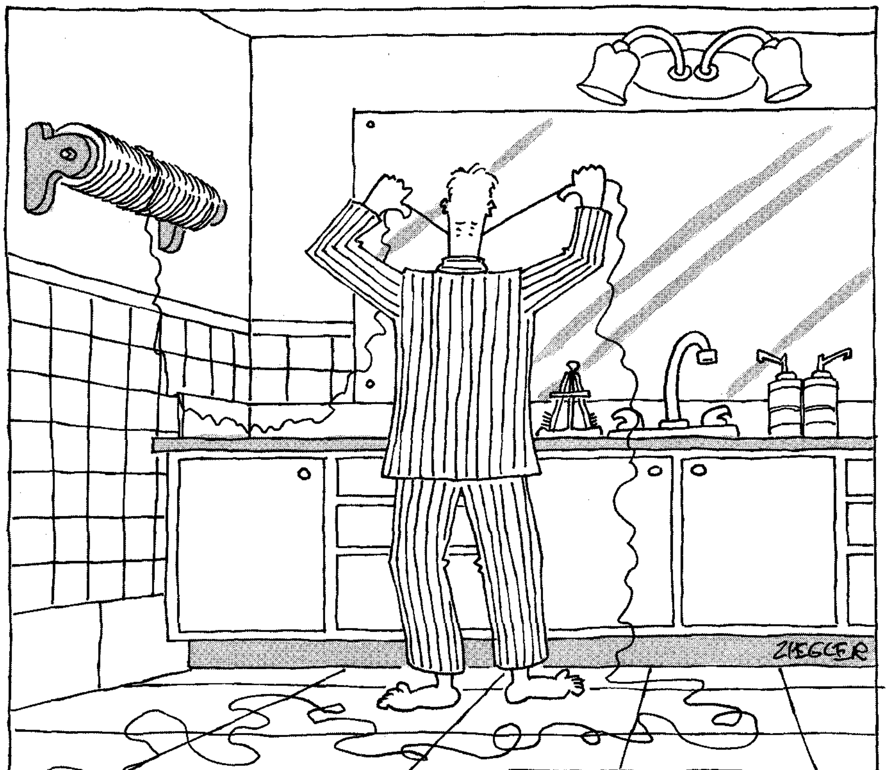
One of the groups invited to Washington to meet with the task force was composed of local officials from areas with G.M. plants, where towns will be directly affected by whatever happens to the company. Among that group was Ron Webb, the city council chairman of Shreveport, Louisiana, which has had a G.M. plant since 1981. The plant once employed more than two thousand workers, producing Hummer S.U.V.s and trucks as well as Chevrolet Colorado pickups. G.M. has said that, as part of its downsizing, it will drop the Hummer brand (as well as shrink Pontiac and divest itself of Saab and Saturn). Webb is a U.A.W. member, and has worked at the Shreveport plant almost since it opened. He is less than four years from retirement.

Webb said after the Washington meeting that he was impressed by the seriousness of the task force but he was not comforted by what he heard. He said that Bloom, wearing a sports jacket and a shirt with an open collar, listened carefully and took copious notes. Bloom asked a few questions, and at one point he mused aloud that he didn't see how G.M. could survive outside of bankruptcy.

"He said this thing was going to get hairy and unpleasant before it was over with," Webb recalls. "From what he said, you could tell it was going to be serious. And it was going to get ugly."

Bloom's hint about bankruptcy was an indication of where he and Rattner were heading. Corker had warned that, absent the binding deadline that would have been imposed by legislation, the union and the bondholders would try to outlast each other in negotiations with G.M., and that is what happened. The bondholders, who had been asked to accept thirty-three cents on the dollar, argued that the union, which was being offered half of G.M.'s twenty-billion-dollar VEBA obligation in amortized cash payments, was getting a better deal. The bondholders were widely seen to be gambling that the government would eventually step in with a bailout, which would yield a nice payday for those who had bought the bonds at distressed prices.

The union, for its part, argued that



autoworkers had sacrificed quite a lot in recent negotiations with the carmakers: among other things, they had agreed to a two-tier wage system, allowing them to pay new hires half the rate earned by veteran workers. The union had also reached a milestone deal with Ford in early March, agreeing to accept half of Ford's VEBA debt in stock, and agreeing to wage and benefit concessions that would bring Ford's labor costs to just above fifty dollars an hour in two years—a compensation rate roughly on a par with that paid by the transplant companies.

But the union did not make a deal with G.M., and by the last week of March it was clear that G.M. would not be able to meet the terms of its federal loan by March 31st. It was also evident, however, that the government was not going to recall the loans it had made to G.M. and Chrysler, forcing immediate bankruptcy. The President had publicly declared that he would not let the auto industry fail, which may have encouraged union and bondholder recalcitrance. Yet, with public anger over bailouts intensifying, the Administration knew it couldn't simply allow the companies to miss another deadline with impunity and collect more federal money—although that is essentially what happened.

Obama was scheduled to give a speech about the auto industry on March 30th, a day before leaving for Europe. Obama's team decided that his speech assessing the automakers' progress "would not sugarcoat it," as someone close to the matter put it, and that the President would specifically mention the prospect of bankruptcy.

The President's speech required a certain rhetorical sleight of hand; one view of events was that G.M. and Chrysler had failed to meet the terms of their government loan but the government was going to give them more money and more time anyway—thirty days, in the case of Chrysler, sixty days for General Motors.

But Obama's team had already insured that the parties involved, and the public, got the message that the Administration was serious. On the previous Friday, March 27th, G.M.'s top executives—Rick Wagoner, Fritz Henderson, and the company's chief financial officer, Ray Young—met with the task force in Washington. Rattner asked for a one-on-one meeting with Wagoner, and told him that he needed to resign. Fritz Henderson would now be running the company.

Wagoner was being made to take the fall for the refusal of the union and the bondholders to relent, partly because the task force believed that it didn't have the option of firing Gettelfinger. The task force felt that it was management's job to resolve the issues with its debt-holders, and that G.M. under Wagoner had failed to do so while burning through more than thirteen billion dollars of taxpayer money and pleading for much more.

The bigger problem with Wagoner, as the task force saw it, was that his exalted view of General Motors as an indispensable institution made it impossible for him to credibly threaten impending doom. The Administration intends to have the U.A.W. issues resolved before G.M.'s fate is decided, in bankruptcy court or out. This may be the best course for the autoworkers, because in bankruptcy court there is always the possibility that the company's obligations to the union will be all but wiped away. The government wants the union to grant concessions even greater than those it granted to Ford earlier this year; by agreeing to such terms, the union may win in the long run if the government effectively nationalizes G.M.'s pension or health-care debts. But the best leverage in forcing the union to agree, in the task force's view, is the threat of bankruptcy (whether or not that is the actual intention)—the threat that Rick Wagoner couldn't credibly deliver.

In the weeks since Obama's speech, the press has been filled with stories about the likelihood of a "surgical" bankruptcy for General Motors, from which a new company, shorn of its debt and troubled assets, would quickly emerge. Among those who increasingly spoke publicly of such an eventuality was Fritz Henderson. Reporting on the company's progress last week, Henderson said that he hoped to avoid bankruptcy but was preparing for it; he also said that G.M. would require another $4.6 billion in aid this quarter.

Obama said that his ultimatum to General Motors and Chrysler was based on the analysis of his auto task force, which had been to Detroit only once, in an all-day cram session three weeks earlier. Bloom, Rattner, and their party had spent the morning of their Detroit visit at Solidarity House, the national headquarters of the autoworkers' union, and then headed out for meetings with G.M. The company's headquarters was just three miles down Jefferson Avenue, in a glass-and-steel skyscraper complex called the Renaissance Center, but G.M. had arranged for the session to be held at its Technology Center, in Warren, Michigan, twenty miles north of Detroit.

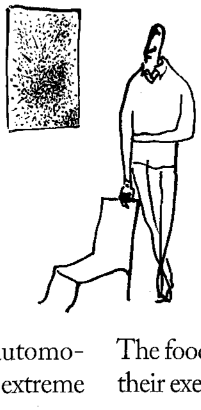
The Tech Center was dedicated in 1956, midway through an American century that General Motors had done much to define. The engineering and research facility, designed by Eero Saarinen, was considered a triumph in the Internal Modern style, with its low glazed-brick buildings and interiors that featured suspended granite stairways with stainless-steel spindles. The chief designer's office is like something from the set of "Mad Men," with rolled-wood panelling, built-in sofas, and a glass-topped coffee table that can be raised and lowered by push-button command. The facility was an homage to G.M.'s tradition of technical innovation, begun by its first research director, Charles Kettering, whose inventions included the electric starter. G.M.'s research teams had pioneered the use of the catalytic converter—a partial solution to emission pollutants—and its investigations in the material sciences often found applications far beyond the automobile (one of the first mechanical hearts was built by G.M.). Kettering, who was seventy-nine in 1956, attended the center's dedication, which was addressed, via live closed-circuit television, by President Eisenhower, who interrupted a visit with Indonesia's President Sukarno for the occasion. "This particular center is a place for leadership in furthering new attacks on the technological frontier," Eisenhower said. "Beyond that frontier lie better and fuller employment, opportunities for people to demonstrate yet again the value of a system based on the dignity of human beings, and on their free opportunities in life."

The auto task force spent two hours with G.M.'s top executives in one of the center's conference rooms, going through the dreary arithmetic of insolvency. When the session ended, the executives played their best remaining card: they escorted the President's party out to the center's grounds for a test drive in the

Chevy Volt. The center's Larry Burns, the director of research and development, has spent most of his life at General Motors, at a safe remove from such matters as VEBA payments and debt-for-equity swaps. He and others believe that the automotive industry is on the verge of a dramatic transformation—not the sort involving bankruptcy reorganization but something akin to that of Henry Ford's a century ago. Burns talks of the industry's "new DNA," which is already producing technologies destined to supplant the internal-combustion engine.

The Volt is G.M.'s big bet on that new DNA, a car meant to be an affordable, mass-produced, all-electric vehicle that can be recharged by plugging it into a household outlet. In 2007, G.M. pledged to take the vehicle from concept to showroom in less than three years, putting it in consumers' garages by the autumn of next year, an undertaking that company executives likened to the Apollo moon project. G.M. had invested nearly a billion dollars in the Volt. As the company found itself increasingly in the business of pleasing Washington, the Volt assumed ever greater prominence in G.M.'s projections for the future. Rick Wagoner had mentioned the Volt in his congressional testimony, and it was the car he arrived in on his return trip to Washington. The company's viability report to Congress proclaimed, "Volt represents a fundamental reinvention of the American automobile industry."

It was an ambitious assertion for a car that has not yet been fitted to its body, but the Volt's progress so far warrants some optimism. (Obama's stimulus bill provides rebates of up to seventy-five hundred dollars to anyone who buys a Volt or other plug-in vehicle.) The car is powered by a huge lithium-ion battery, formulated with new chemistry for automobiles, and in rigorous test runs in extreme climates the prototype Volt has not encountered a glitch big enough to throw it off schedule. If the Volt redeems even a portion of its promise, it will be a remarkable, and most unlikely, achievement, both for G.M. and for the car's creator, Bob Lutz.



Lutz, the vice-chairman and head of product development for G.M., is a throwback to a type once known in Detroit as a "car guy," a charismatic executive with an intuitive feel for the qualities that give a car allure. Lutz, an ex-fighter pilot, began his career at G.M. in the early nineteen-sixties, then helped to run operations at Ford, BMW, and Chrysler, where his signature creation was the high-performance muscle car the Dodge Viper.

In automobile circles, Lutz was known as Maximum Bob, the person least likely to be associated with the development of an environmentally sensitive vehicle (he had once referred to global warming as "a total crock of shit"). The greening of G.M. was the last thing on Rick Wagoner's mind when he brought Lutz back to G.M. in 2001, at the age of sixty-eight. G.M.'s product line at the time was notable for its lack of style, a collection of forgettable vehicles that filled the car-rental fleets; Lutz insisted that every new vehicle begin with eye-catching aesthetics, with engineering to follow. He was responsible for developing the Pontiac Solstice (a dashing little roadster, whose sales ultimately disappointed), the Cadillac CTS, and a reimagined Chevrolet Malibu, which was named last year's Car of the Year.

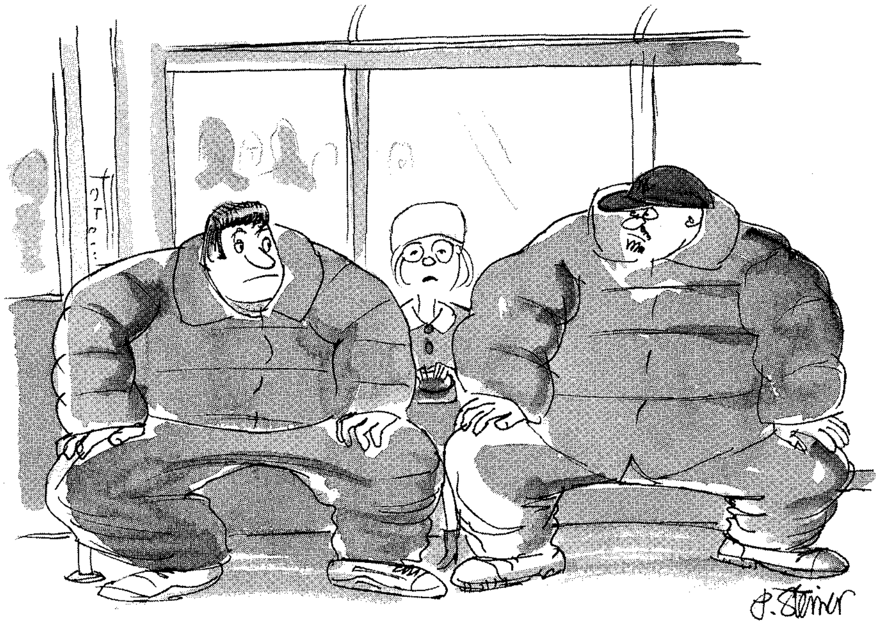
Five years ago, Lutz became an advocate of "eco-cool," as he terms the drive for fuel-efficient cars, by acting on a competitive impulse. Toyota had introduced its gasoline-electric hybrid vehicle, the Prius, and the car became a sensation. At G.M., the leap in innovation by its Japanese competitor stung badly. Lutz, who has a master's degree from Berkeley in marketing, was particularly annoyed. "If you'll remember, in the national media a few years ago Toyota was the company that could do no wrong," Lutz recalled. "I mean, everything was better at Toyota. The food in their cafeterias was healthier, their executives were smarter, their workers were happier, the ships that they shipped the cars in were cleaner. I mean, they were like deities. And all because of this *Prius*, which was a good technological achievement but above all a brilliant, brilliant move from a standpoint of changing your corporate image."

During one meeting, Lutz suggested that G.M. trump the Prius with an all-electric car. He had spent a brief period before returning to G.M. as the chief executive of a battery company, Exide Technologies, and he believed that advances in the lithium-ion battery might make it suitable. The response from senior leadership, Lutz recalls, was an emphatic rebuff: "One or two of them said, 'Bob, we lost over a billion on the last electric car—do you want us to lose another billion?' "

G.M.'s first electric car, the EV1, had caused one of the greatest corporate public-relations disasters since the New Coke. G.M. built the car largely to satisfy a 1990 mandate from the California Air Resources Board requiring that two per cent of an automaker's sales in the state meet zero-emission standards by 1998, and ten per cent by 2003. G.M.'s response illustrated both its technological prowess and its institutional hubris. Two years ahead of the deadline, G.M. sent into the market, on a limited basis, the EV1, a sleek two-door coupe, with that peculiar feature of the electric vehicle—rocket-ride torque that has to be geared down to avoid whiplash. (Zero to sixty in under six seconds is not particularly remarkable in an electric vehicle.)

The vehicle was never for sale. Eight hundred EV1s were made available through lease to customers in California and Arizona, and several of them ended up in the garages of celebrities (Tom Hanks and Mel Gibson each had one), who formed the core of a devoted cult following. But G.M. said that the car could not be commercially viable. Each vehicle cost about eighty thousand dollars to produce, and company research showed that the broader public was put off by "range anxiety"—fear of running out of power before reaching the special charging unit at home. G.M. recalled all the cars, despite protests from EV1 aficionados, and sent them to the crusher. The company explained that it couldn't allow any of the cars to remain on the road because of legal liability. The electric car's fans saw it as evidence of a conspiracy between G.M. and Big Oil, which provided the theme for a documentary film called "Who Killed the Electric Car?"

Lutz persisted, and launched a skunkworks project for his idea, hoping to test whether a battery-operated car could overcome the range-anxiety factor. The



*"This is my stop. May I be released?"*

big breakthrough came when one of his engineers, Jon Lauckner, convinced Lutz that the answer was not in finding a battery that could provide a range of several hundred miles—which would make the car prohibitively expensive—but in giving a battery extended range by recharging it as the car was being driven. The car would have a battery with a range of about forty miles—the distance of most daily commutes—plus an onboard generator powered by a small gasoline engine. The car would be powered solely by the battery, and the gas engine would kick in to generate electricity only when the range was exceeded. A commuter driving the car less than forty miles wouldn't burn any gas; even on a long trip, the car would have a range of about three hundred miles, at a fuel-efficiency rate of more than a hundred miles per gallon.

G.M. débuted the concept at the 2007 Detroit Auto Show, assigning it to its Chevrolet division and giving it the name Volt. The automotive press swooned; Toyota executives said the battery was impracticable.

Lutz had planned to stay at G.M. until the Volt's introduction, but an environment of government supervision does not suit his nature. "You'd be insane not to be mildly depressed with where we are, both in terms of the general economy and General Motors' status," he says. "The absence of regard in which we are held by our elected officials, all of this, of course, is mildly depressing." In February, Lutz announced that he would retire at the end of this year, leaving with the satisfaction of knowing that Toyota is now pursuing its own all-electric car, powered by a lithium-ion battery. "They have announced they are going to do something like this in 2012," he says. "I'd say we have a two- or three-year head start on everybody."

One question that Lutz will leave unanswered is that of the Volt's commercial viability. G.M. plans to make ten thousand of the vehicles in its first year of production, and up to sixty thousand annually within five years. But for a compact car the Volt will be expensive, costing perhaps as much as forty thousand dollars—half of that possibly for the battery alone. The American market for pricey enviro-cars is fickle, as Toyota has painfully learned. When gas prices reached four dollars a gallon last summer, Toyota dealers ran low on their stocks of Priuses, and some charged a premium for the hybrid; when gas prices fell, the stockpile grew to an almost three-month supply, and sales remain at a virtual standstill. Mike Jackson, the chief executive of AutoNation, a national chain of dealerships, has said that only about five per cent of car buyers are in the market for a car for its environmental virtues; the rest buy on price, and other appeals. Lutz, the former anti-environmentalist, has suggested that the government needs to motivate buyers with a comprehensive energy policy that will stabilize gas prices in the three-to-four-dollar-a-gallon range, by means of a fuel tax.

Larry Burns believes that, as with most technologies, the cost of the lithium-ion batteries will go down with each generation. "You can't go into Home Depot and pick up this battery," he says. G.M. worked with more than three dozen cell suppliers before choosing LG Chem to produce the Volt battery, and if the Volt and other electric cars stay in production he expects competition for the battery business to drive the prices down. "The technology game is all about living to play to the next generation," Burns says.

Obama, in his speech on March 30th announcing his plans for G.M. and Chrysler, spoke of the auto industry in tones not dissimilar from those employed by Eisenhower more than half a century ago: "This industry is, like no other, an emblem of the American spirit; a once and future symbol of America's success." The President also said that he has one overriding goal for the industry: "The United States of America will lead the world in building the next generation of clean cars."

Burns imagines a transportation grid of interconnected electric cars, able to drive themselves, and even to repair themselves, through software downloads. Burns believes that G.M. could lead in achieving Obama's goal. "It just takes somebody to be first," he says. But Burns has also made a study of periods of cataclysmic transformation in American business, and he knows that G.M.'s chances are not good. "The literature I've studied about incumbents and mature industries facing the transformational possibilities that I see right now, they usually don't come out of it the winner," he says.

There will be a bankruptcy of one sort or another, and it can't be known whether the Technology Center, or even the Volt, will emerge on the other side. "There's a saying—once you've seen a scary movie three times, it's not so scary anymore," Burns told me. "This movie that we're living through right now is a different kind of scary movie." ♦

FICTION

# VAST HELL

### BY GUILLERMO MARTÍNEZ

A small town is a vast hell.
—*Argentinean proverb.*

Often, when the grocery store is empty and all you can hear is the buzzing of flies, I think of that young man whose name we never knew and whom no one in town ever mentioned again. For some reason that I can't explain, I always imagine him as we saw him that first time: the dusty clothes, the bristling beard, and especially the long, dishevelled hair that almost covered his eyes. It was the beginning of spring, which is why, when he came into the store, I took him for a camper headed south. He bought a few cans of food and some coffee; as I added up the bill, he looked at his reflection in the window, brushed his hair off his forehead, and asked me if there was a barber in town.

In those days, there were two barbers in Puente Viejo. Now I realize that if he'd gone to Old Melchor's he might never have met the French Woman, and no one would have gossiped about them. But Melchor's place was at the other end of town, and I had no reason to anticipate what happened.

The fact is that I sent him to Cerviño's place, and it seems that while Cerviño was giving him a haircut the French Woman appeared. And the French Woman looked at the boy the way she looked at all men. And that was when the bloody business started, because the boy stayed on in town and we all thought the same thing: that he'd stayed on because of her.

It hadn't been a year since Cerviño and his wife had settled in Puente Viejo, and we knew very little about them. They didn't socialize with anyone, as the whole town used to point out angrily. If the truth be told, in poor Cerviño's case it was little more than shyness, but the French Woman may, in fact, have been quite stuck up. They'd come from the big city the previous summer, at the beginning of the season, and when Cerviño opened his barbershop I remember thinking that he'd soon send Old Melchor under, because he had a hairdresser's diploma and had won a prize in a crewcutting competition, and he owned a pair of electric clippers, a hair dryer, and a swivel chair, and he would sprinkle vegetable extracts onto your scalp and even spray some lotion on you if you didn't stop him in time. Also, in Cerviño's shop the latest sports magazine was always in the rack. And, above all, there was the French Woman. I never actually knew why people called her the French Woman, and I never tried to find out—I'd have been disappointed to discover that the French Woman was born, for instance, in Bahía Blanca, or, even worse, in a small town like this one. Whatever the truth, the fact is that I'd never met a woman quite like her. Maybe it was simply that she didn't wear a bra: even in winter you could see that she wasn't wearing a thing under her sweater. Or maybe it was her habit of appearing in the barbershop barely dressed and putting on her makeup in the mirror, right there in front of everyone. But that wasn't it. There was something even more disturbing about the French Woman than her body, which always seemed uneasy in its clothes, even more unsettling than the low plunge of her neckline. She would stare into your eyes steadily, until you had to look down, and her eyes were full of incitement, full of promise, but they also had a mocking glimmer, as if she were testing you, knowing in advance that you'd never take up her challenge, as if she had already made up her mind that no one in town measured up to her wild standards. So she'd provoke us with her eyes, and scornfully, also with her eyes, she'd draw away.

All this in front of Cerviño, who seemed to notice nothing, bent in silence over the backs of our necks, clicking his scissors in the air from time to time.

Oh, yes, the French Woman was at first Cerviño's best publicity, and in the early months his barbershop was very busy. But I had been mistaken about Melchor. The old man was no fool, and he gradually started to lure his clients back. He somehow managed to get some porno magazines, which the military had forbidden in those days, and later, during the World Cup, he gathered all his savings and bought a color TV, the first one in town. Then he started saying, to whoever would listen, that in Puente Viejo there was one and only one barbershop for men; Cerviño's was a hairdresser's for poofs.

However, my guess is that if many returned to Melchor's barbershop it was, once again, because of the French Woman; few men can stand being mocked or humiliated for very long by a woman.

As I was saying, the young man stayed on. He set up a tent on the outskirts of town, behind the dunes, not far from the house of Espinosa's widow. He rarely came to the grocery store; whenever he did, he'd shop for a long haul, for a fortnight or a month, but every single day he visited the barber's.

And, since it was hard to believe that he went there only to read the sports pages, people started to pity Cerviño. In the beginning, everyone felt sorry for him. The truth is that it wasn't difficult to feel sorry for Cerviño: he had the innocent air of a cherub and an easy smile, as shy people often do. He was a man of very few words, and at times he appeared to sink into a tortuous and distant world; his eyes would wander into space and he'd stand for a long while, sharpening his razor blade or interminably clicking his scissors, so that you had to cough to bring him back to reality. Once or twice, I surprised him in the mirror, staring at the French Woman with a mute, concentrated passion, as if he himself were unable to believe that such a woman was his wife. And that devoted gaze, which held not the shadow of a doubt, filled us with pity.

On the other hand, it was equally easy for us to condemn the French Woman, above all for the town's married women and for the spinsters in search of husbands, who, from the very start, had made common cause against her fearful necklines. But many men also felt resentful of the French Woman, especially those who had a reputation as the lady-killers of Puente Viejo, such as Nielsen the Jew—men who weren't accustomed to being slighted, much less scorned, by a woman.

And, either because the World Cup was over and there was nothing left to talk about or because there was a dearth of scandals in town, all conversations led eventually to the goings on of the French Woman and her young man. From behind the counter, I'd hear over and over the same comments: what Nielsen had seen one night on the beach (it had been a cold night and yet they had both stripped naked and they must have been on drugs, because they had done something that Nielsen would not describe, even with no women present); what Espinosa's widow had said (that from her window she could always hear laughter and moaning coming from the

FERDINANDO SCIANNA/MAGNUM

boy's tent, the unmistakable sound of two bodies rolling around together); what the eldest of the Vidals had told us (that right in the barbershop, right there in front of him and of Cerviño . . .). Who knows how much of the gossip was true.

One day, we realized that the boy and the French Woman had disappeared. I mean, the boy didn't seem to be around anymore, and no one had seen the French Woman, either in the barbershop or on the pathway down by the beach where she liked to go for walks. The first thing we all thought was that they'd run away together, and, maybe because running away always has a romantic ring to it, or because the dangerous temptress was now out of reach, the women seemed willing to forgive the French Woman for this. It was obvious that there was something wrong in that marriage, they'd say. Cerviño was too old for her, and also the boy was very handsome. . . . And with secretive giggles they'd confess that maybe they would have done the same.

One afternoon, when the matter was being discussed yet again, Espinosa's widow, who happened to be in the grocery store, said in a mysterious voice that in her opinion something far worse had taken place; the boy, as we all knew, had set up his tent near her house, and even though she, like the rest of us, hadn't seen him for days the tent was still there and it seemed to her very strange—she repeated the words "very strange"—that they would not have taken the tent with them. Someone said that maybe the police should be told, and then the widow muttered that it might also be fitting to keep an eye on Cerviño. I remember becoming angry and yet not knowing how to respond: my rule is never to enter into an argument with a customer. I began by weakly saying that no one should be accused without proof, and that in my opinion it was impossible that Cerviño, that someone like Cerviño . . . But the widow cut in: it was a well-known fact that shy people, introverted people, can be extremely dangerous when pushed too far.

We were still going around in circles when Cerviño appeared at the door.

There was a deep silence; he must have realized that we were talking about him, because everyone looked down or away. I saw him blush, and, more than ever, he seemed to me like a helpless child who had never tried to grow up. When he gave me his order, I noticed that he had only a few groceries on his list and that he hadn't asked for yogurt. While he was paying, the widow abruptly asked him about the French Woman. Cerviño blushed once more, but gently now, as if he felt honored by so much solicitude. He said that his wife had travelled up to the city to look after her father, who was very sick, but that she would be back soon, maybe in a week's time. While he was speaking, a curious expression, which at first I found hard to parse, crept over the faces around me: disappointment. And as soon as Cerviño was gone the widow renewed her attack. She, the widow said, had not been taken in by that humbug; we'd never see the poor woman again. And in a low voice she insisted that there was a murderer on the loose in Puente Viejo, and that any one of us could be the next victim.

A week went by, then a whole month, and the French Woman hadn't returned. Nor had the boy been seen again. The kids from town started using his tent to play at cowboys and Indians, and Puente Viejo divided itself into two camps: those who were convinced that Cerviño was a criminal and those of us who believed that the French Woman would come back—and we were becoming fewer and fewer. One could hear people say that Cerviño had slit the boy's throat with a razor while cutting his hair, and mothers would forbid their children to play in the street outside the barbershop and beg their husbands to go back to Melchor's. However, and this may seem strange, Cerviño wasn't bereft of clients: the boys in town would dare one another to go and sit in the doomed barber's chair and ask for a razor haircut, and it became a sign of virility to wear one's hair brushed upward and sprayed.

When we asked for news of the French Woman, Cerviño would repeat the story about his sick father-in-law, which no longer sounded believable. People stopped greeting him, and we heard that Espinosa's widow had told the police inspector that Cerviño should be arrested. But the inspector had answered that, until the bodies were found, nothing could be done.

The town started making conjectures about the bodies: some said that Cerviño had buried them under his patio; others that he'd cut them into strips and thrown them into the sea. And gradually, in the townspeople's imagination, Cerviño grew into an increasingly monstrous being.

In the grocery store, listening to the same talk over and over, I began to feel a superstitious fear, the presentiment that in these endless discussions something awful was being hatched. In the meantime, Espinosa's widow seemed to have gone out of her mind. She went about digging holes everywhere, armed with a ridiculous child's shovel, hollering at the top of her voice that she wouldn't rest until she'd found the bodies.

And one day she found them.

It was an afternoon at the beginning of November. The widow came into the store and asked me if I had any shovels, and then, in a loud voice so that everyone would hear, she said that the

## A MODERN GREEK FOLK SONG

Back in front of St. Dimitriou, start of winter,
the boy passes by with his oxen, heading for the fields.
And the girl who loves him takes him fresh bread.
On the crest of the hill she sits down and says to her George,
"Come, sweetheart, eat some bread, eat your fill."
The boy falls to kissing, the girl to playing her games.
The oxen tire themselves out, joined the day long.
Blackeye turns toward Sweetface and finally says,
"Isn't the boss anywhere at all to get us unyoked?"

—*Anonymous*

(*Translated, from the Greek, by Edmund Keeley.*)

inspector had sent her in search of shovels and volunteers to dig in the dunes behind the bridge. Next, slowly dropping the words one by one, she said that it was there that she had seen, with her very own eyes, a dog devouring a human hand. A shiver ran down my back; suddenly it had all become true, and while I was looking for the shovels, and while I locked up the store, I kept on hearing, without quite believing it yet, the horrific conversation: "dog," "body," "human hand."

Proudly, the widow led the march. I trailed behind, carrying the shovels. I looked at the others and saw the usual faces, the people who came to the store to buy pasta and tea. I looked around me and nothing had changed, no sudden gust of wind, no unexpected silence. It was an afternoon like all others, at that useless hour when one wakes up from one's nap. Below us, the houses stood in an ever-decreasing line, and the sea itself, in the distance, seemed provincial, unthreatening. For an instant, I thought that I understood my own feelings of incredulity. Because something like this couldn't be happening here, not in Puente Viejo.

When we reached the dunes, the inspector hadn't found anything yet. He was digging bare-chested, and his shovel rose and fell unhampered. He gestured vaguely around him, and I handed out the shovels and sank mine into the spot that looked safest. For a while, the only sound was the dry thud of metal hitting sand. I was starting to lose my fear of the shovel and to think that maybe the widow had made a mistake, that maybe what she had told us wasn't true, when we heard a furious barking. It was the dog that the widow had seen earlier, a poor anemic creature running desperately around us in circles. The inspector tried to shoo it away by throwing bricks at it, but the dog came back again and again, and at a certain point seemed almost to jump up at the inspector's throat.

And then we realized that this was indeed the place. The inspector started to dig once again, faster and faster; his frenzy was contagious, the shovels moved in unison, and suddenly the inspector shouted that he'd hit something. He dug a little deeper and the first body appeared.

The others barely glanced at it and went back to their shovels, almost enthusiastically, searching for the French Woman, but I went up to the body and forced myself to look at it closely. Between its sand-filled eyes was a black hole. It wasn't the boy.

I turned around, to warn the inspector, and it was like stepping into a nightmare: everyone was digging up bodies. It was as if the bodies were sprouting from the earth. Every time a shovel dug in, a head would roll out or a mutilated torso would appear. Wherever you looked, there were dead bodies and more dead bodies, and heads and more heads.

The horror made me wander from one place to another; I wasn't able to think, I wasn't able to understand, until I saw a back riddled with bullets and, farther away, a blindfolded head. Then I realized what it was. I looked at the inspector and saw that he, too, had understood, and he ordered us to stay where we were, not to move, and went back into town to get instructions.

Of the time that went by until he came back, I remember only the incessant barking of the dog, the smell of death, and the figure of the widow prodding with her child's shovel among the corpses, shouting at us to carry on, because the French Woman had not yet been found. When the inspector returned, he was straight-backed and solemn, like someone ready to give orders.

He stood in front of us and told us to bury the bodies again, just as we had found them. We all went back to our shovels, no one daring to say a word.

As the sand covered the bodies, I asked myself whether the boy might not be here, too. The dog was barking and jumping up and down, as if crazy. Then we saw the inspector, one knee on the ground and his gun in his hand. He fired a single shot. The dog fell down dead. Then he took two steps, still holding the gun, and kicked the dog's body away, for us to bury it as well. Before heading back to town, he ordered us not to speak to anyone about what we had seen, and jotted down, one by one, the names of all who had been there.

The French Woman returned a few days later: her father had completely recovered. We never mentioned the boy again. The tent was stolen as soon as the holiday season started. ♦

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Alberto Manguel.*)

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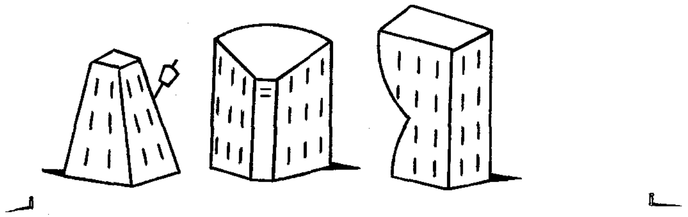
# THE CRITICS



PHILIPPE WEISBECKER

### POP MUSIC

# LADIES WILD

*How not dumb is Gaga?*

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Dedicated fans of popular music have a certain conversation at least once a year. Call it The Question of Endurance. You and your friends are talking about music, and the conversation turns to a popular band. You express support. A friend voices her opinion, maybe as favorable as yours, but appends a qualifier: "I like them, but will they be around in ten years?" You may feel compelled to defend whomever it is you're talking about, covering the present moment and the future with your positive take. After trying this approach, though, you realize that pop music has no Constitution and doesn't operate like a de-facto Supreme Court: precedent is not always established, and isn't even necessary. Pop rarely accretes in a tidy, serial manner—it zigs, zags, eats itself, and falls over its shoelaces. Some pop successes go head to head with Blake and Bach; others win their blue ribbons by doing everything upside down and out of tune.

Exceptional pop creates a precedent precisely by abrogating the presumptive rules. How did that grouchy Bob Dylan become a critical favorite by spitting back at interviewers with silence and riddles? (Didn't being cute and funny help the Beatles? Why would the opposite behavior work just as well, and at exactly the same time?) How did the Jamaican shantytown hero Bob Marley become an American Ivy League dorm-room staple? How did the tiny, androgynous Prince become a hero to alpha-male guitar-solo fiends? Pop acts become classic when they reveal the contingent nature of "classic."

So it goes with one-hit (or two-hit) wonders, who can also become classics—or not. The nature of pop recycling makes it hard to measure, or define, endurance. In 1980, Gary Numan's synthesizer pop song "Cars" was a reliable presence on broadcast radio here and in the United Kingdom. By 1985, though, you'd have been hard pressed to find a trace of Numan in the mainstream of pop. Today, he's ubiquitous—"Cars" has been referenced in television shows and pop songs steadily throughout the past decade, and Numan's synthesizer sounds are audible in the work of tiny Brooklyn bands and enormous stars alike. Just because the anonymous Euro-techno group Eiffel 65 was on the charts for only one stretch in 2000 does not mean that its mission was not accomplished. Eiffel 65's one known song—its nonsense hit "Blue"—is the basis for a new Top Forty hit by Flo Rida called "Sugar," and has inspired many user-generated videos on YouTube that are all better than the official video, a C.G.I. monstrosity. The artist who stays on the charts for years without interruption sometimes does it by virtue of professional acuity and inoffensive predictability. Some of pop's most delightful figures endure exactly because we can't figure out what they are up to.

Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta would have you believe that she's not just beating the system—in her version, she's stormed the castle walls, spirited away the Dauphin, and changed the national language to semaphore. Better known as Lady Gaga, Germanotta was born twenty-three years ago in Yonkers and has had two verifiable worldwide No. 1 hits, which are definitely dance music: "Just Dance" and "Poker Face." (The kids say electro-pop, I say disco, and I suppose we're both right.) Less verifiable is her theorizing about her work. She cites Andy Warhol, claims to be a "fame Robin Hood" who has lost her mind, opines in public about whether a certain shade of red is "Communist," and has dropped Rilke's name more than once. Don't take this skepticism for distaste—Lady Gaga and I share preferences, especially as far as well-written pop music goes, and I am thrilled to see Communism and Rilke getting ink. I am also happy that her album, "The Fame," will be with us all year, even if you can't find Marx or Rilke anywhere in the music. What is most amusing is watching a trained pro like Lady Gaga try to sell herself as the Flying Lizards. Who were they? A colorfully deadpan British art-school unit of brainy, primitive one-hit wonders ("Money") who did business in the early eighties and are resurrected in spirit every seven years or so. They were really odd.

Gaga is not odd, give or take some warbles and that one time during a session for AOL when she pounded on her keyboard with her high heel, but she is as smart as she repeatedly claims to be. Germanotta went to Convent of the Sacred Heart High School and grew up on the Upper West Side. (Her parents call her Joanne.) After a stint at N.Y.U.'s Tisch School, she dropped out and, while still a teen, went to Los Angeles, where she got a contract with Def Jam. That gig ended in three months, so Germanotta came home—not yet calling herself Lady Gaga—and began performing songs and burlesque routines in New York clubs with a friend, the d.j. Lady Starlight. Eventually, she returned to Los Angeles, and signed with Interscope Records. She wrote songs for the Pussycat Dolls and one for Britney Spears (a strange, compelling love song disguised as a dance number, called "Quicksand," which is available only on the European version of Spears's "Circus") and worked with Akon, the

*Melody—and the cheerful embrace of the moment as it happens. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.*

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certified pop star with an ornately embellished criminal past, who signed Gaga to his label.

This is not as weird as it might sound. Gaga can really sing and really write. That said, she embellished when she says, of "The Fame," that she "did the whole goddamn thing." In reality, her collaborators on her début album are a wisely picked cast of new and old pros who know how to make pop records sound like pop records. Rob Fusari, who dubbed Germanotta Lady Gaga, after the Queen song "Radio Ga Ga," co-wrote some of Destiny's Child's best work. RedOne is a Moroccan producer whose song "Bamboo" was named the Official Melody of soccer's 2006 FIFA World Cup. More to the point, RedOne's longtime residence in Sweden means that he has access to the enormous ice pool of Nordic hooks that Americans never seem to match. It makes sense that RedOne and Germanotta received a Grammy nomination for "Just Dance," the song that presumably inspired Spears to enlist Ms. Gaga's help for "Circus."

How not dumb is Lady Gaga? Released exactly one year ago, "Just Dance" was one of the first big records to ride the sea change in pop, away from hip-hop and back toward disco, the music that has been in charge of the charts in Europe for a long time. (One current acknowledgment of this shift is a single by a rapper named Kid Cudi, who is currently jostling with Lady Gaga on the iTunes charts with his song "Day 'n' Nite," which re-imagines hip-hop as mumbling over disco rather than yelling over funk.)

With RedOne's help, Gaga summons generations of dance music. "Just Dance" is built around the brawny, slightly overbearing synthesizers of Gary Numan and his British peers like the Human League. (Those keyboards are also the foundation for Euro-techno like Eiffel 65 and for dozens of Continental hits that Americans rarely hear.) Gaga's hard vocal delivery lets her tone bounce off the walls, in the manner of Sharon Brown and Shannon and other eighties dance-floor workhorses. "Just Dance" is about being drunk in a club, which is a great idea, because songs for drunk people in clubs are rarely sharp enough to be so obvious: a lot gets lost in the quest for the clever. The Lady's had too much red wine, turned her shirt inside out, and has a Playboy mouth, whatever that is. Her night could end up on the gossip blogs if she's not careful—she "can't see straight," and can't remember what club she's in, but sings to herself that it's "gonna be O.K.," which will reassure anybody with a liquor license doing business while the song is on. Later in the song, Lady Gaga semi-raps and recalls the weirdo she's borrowed a few moves from, Peaches, a Canadian musician who, like Germanotta, presented herself as a sexually ambiguous performance artist, though Peaches did it a decade ago. It was actually a plausible claim when Peaches made it—she has no worldwide No. 1s. (Yet.)

This is how "The Fame" works. Lady Gaga's current, very big hit, "Poker Face," will likely please the frat boys whom her pull quotes are designed to scare. As the punning title suggests, it's a song about rough sex. (Another song is entitled "I Like It Rough.") "Eh, Eh" echoes Madonna's lighter work, like "La Isla Bonita," and there's even a ballad, to be released as a single when the people who don't like dance music need to be pulled in, called "Brown Eyes."

If you want melody and a cheerful embrace of the moment as it happens, Lady Gaga is a wise bet. Her recent client Britney is currently sleepwalking through her own tour. Not so Ms. Germanotta. On "American Idol," Lady Gaga tore up "Poker Face" and short-circuited the conventions of the show by splitting the song into a drunken solo-piano ballad and an up-tempo truncated version of itself. Germanotta knows that the one-hit wonders are weirder and cooler than the well-paid musicians who stretch their careers over seven years on the stage and twenty more behind it. Can she have it both ways? ♦

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### CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

*From the Portola (Calif.) Reporter.*

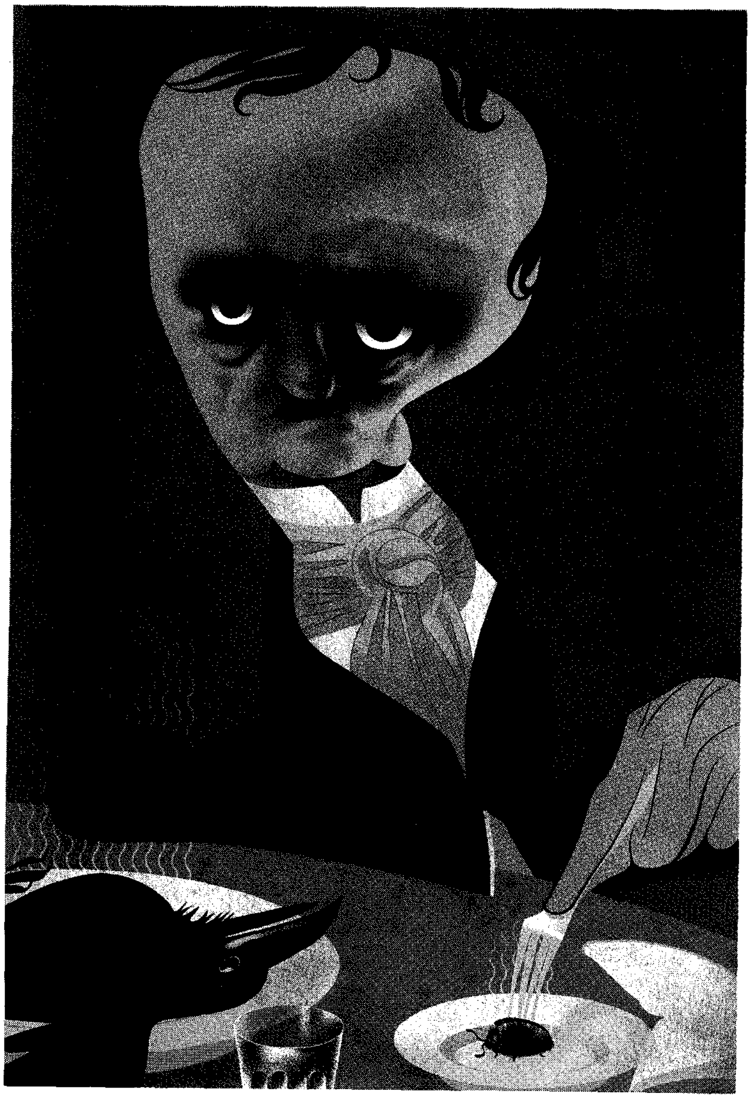
In Portola, a caller reported that while she was in the shower, someone snuck into her house and vomited on her stove. A deputy reported that it appeared to be cooking grease on the stove.

### A CRITIC AT LARGE

# THE HUMBUG

*Edgar Allan Poe and the economy of horror.*

BY JILL LEPORE



*Always in debt, Poe both sought and sneered at the popular audience of his day.*

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

Edgar Allan Poe once wrote an essay called "The Philosophy of Composition," to explain why he wrote "The Raven" backward. The poem tells the story of a man who, "once upon a midnight dreary," while mourning his dead love, Lenore, answers a tapping at his chamber door, to find "darkness there and nothing more." He peers into the darkness, "dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before," and meets a silence broken only by his whispered word, "Lenore?" He closes the door. The tapping starts again. He flings open his shutter and, "with many a flirt and flutter," in flies a raven, "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore." The bird speaks just one word: "Nevermore." That word is the poem's last, but it's where Poe began. He started, he said, "at the end, where all works of art should begin," and he "first put pen to paper" at what became the third-to-last stanza:

> "Prophet," said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!
> By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore,
> Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn,
> It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
> Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
> Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

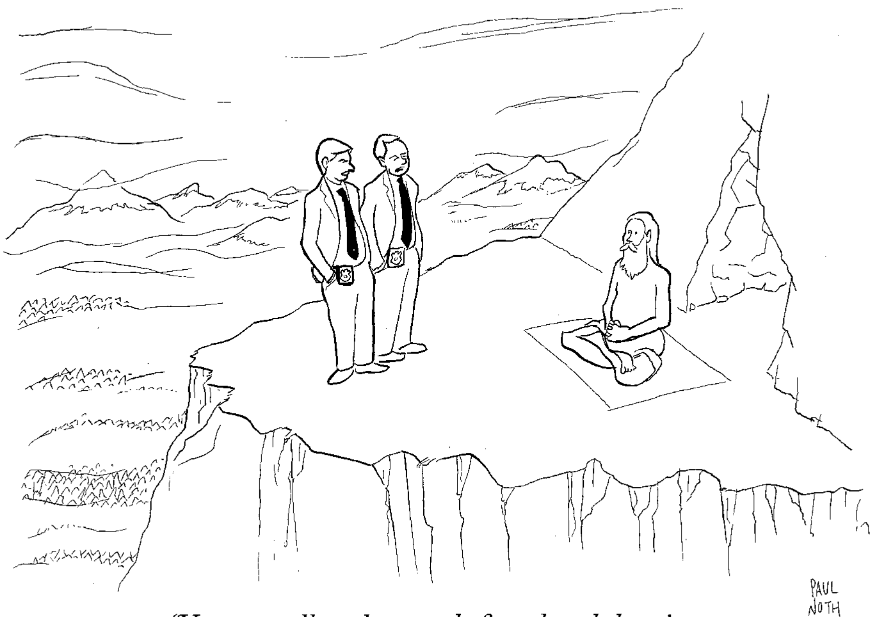
"The Philosophy of Composition" is a lovely little essay, but, as Poe himself admitted, it's a bit of jiggery-pokery, too. Poe didn't actually write "The Raven" backward. The essay is as much a contrivance as the poem itself. Here is a beautiful poem; it does everything a poem should do, is everything a poem should be. And here is a clever essay about the writing of a beautiful poem. Top that. Nearly everything Poe wrote, including the spooky stories for which he is best remembered, has this virtuosic, showy, lilting, and slightly wilting quality, like a peony just past bloom. Poe didn't write "The Raven" to answer the exacting demands of a philosophic Art, or not entirely, anyway. He wrote it for the same reason that he wrote tales like "The Gold-Bug": to stave off starvation. For a long while, Poe lived on bread and molasses; weeks before "The Gold-Bug" was published, he was begging near-strangers on the street for fifty cents to buy something to eat. " 'The Raven' has had a great 'run,' " he wrote to a friend, "but I wrote it for the express purpose of running—just as I did the 'Gold-Bug,' you know. The bird beat the bug, though, all hollow." The public that swallowed that bird and bug Poe strenuously resented. You love Poe or you don't, but, either way, Poe doesn't love you. A writer more condescending to more adoring readers would be hard to find. "The nose of a mob is its imagination," he wrote. "By this, at any time, it can be quietly led."

This year marks the two-hundredth anniversary of Poe's birth and the publication of two collections of gothic tales produced by the Mystery Writers of America. "On a Raven's Wing: New Tales in Honor of Edgar Allan Poe" (Harper; $14.99) contains stories by twenty mystery writers, including Mary Higgins Clark. "In the Shadow of the Master: Classic Tales by Edgar Allan Poe" (William Morrow; $25.99) pairs Poe's best-known stories with modern commentaries; Stephen King muses on

"The Genius of 'The Tell-Tale Heart.'" There's also a sensitive and haunting brief biography, Peter Ackroyd's "Poe: A Life Cut Short" (Doubleday; $21.95), that offers a fitting tribute to Poe's begin-at-the-end philosophy by opening with his horrible and mysterious death, in October of 1849. Poe, drunk and delirious, seems to have been dragged around Baltimore to cast votes, precinct after precinct, in one of that city's infamously corrupt congressional elections, until he finally collapsed. From Ryan's tavern, a polling place in the Fourth Ward, Poe was carried, like a corpse, to a hospital. He died four days later. He was forty years old.

"My whole existence has been the merest Romance," Poe wrote, the year before his death, "in the sense of the most utter unworldliness." This is Byronic bunk. Poe's life was tragic, but he was about as unworldly as a bale of cotton. Poe's world was Andrew Jackson's America, a world of banking collapse, financial panic, and grinding depression that had a particularly devastating effect on the publishing industry, where Poe sought a perch. His biography really is a series of unfortunate events. But two of those events were transatlantic financial crises: the Panic of 1819 and the Panic of 1837, the pit and the pendulum of the antebellum economy. Poe died at the end of a decade known, in Europe, as "the Hungry Forties," and he wasn't the only American to fall face down in the gutter during a seven-year-long depression brought on by a credit collapse. He did not live out of time. He lived in hard times, dark times, up-and-down times. Indigence cast a shadow over everything he attempted. Poverty was his raven, tapping at the door, and it was Poe, not the bird, who uttered, helplessly, another rhyme for "Nevermore." "I send you an original tale," Poe once began a letter, and, at its end, added one line more: "P.S. I am poor."

Edgar Poe was born in Boston, on January 19, 1809, to a talented actress named Eliza Poe and her hapless husband, David, who deserted her. When Edgar was two, his mother died of consumption. Edgar and a brother and sister had little more to depend upon than the charity of strangers. The Poe orphans were separated, and Edgar landed in the home of a wealthy Richmond merchant named John Allan and his sickly, childless wife, Fanny. Allan, who ran a firm called the House of Ellis, never adopted the boy, and never loved him, either. Poe, for his part, took Allan's name but never wanted it. (He signed letters, and published, as "Edgar A. Poe.") In 1815, Allan moved his family to London, to take advantage of the booming British market for Virginia tobacco. Poe attended posh boarding schools. Then, during the Panic of 1819, the first bust in the industrializing nineteenth century, banks failed, factories closed, and Allan's business imploded. Allan, plagued with two hundred thousand dollars of debt, returned to Virginia. Poe turned poet. The earliest verses in his hand that survive were written when he was fifteen: "Last night, with many cares and toils oppress'd, / Weary, I laid me on a couch to rest." Adolescent melancholy, and nothing more. But on the same sheet of paper, just below Poe's scrawl, Allan had calculated the compound interest on a debt.



*"You can tell us the sound of one hand clapping here or you can tell us downtown."*

In 1823, Poe fell in love with Jane Stannard, the unhinged mother of a school friend. A year later, Stannard died, insane. Poe spent much time at her graveside. "No more" became his favorite phrase. In 1825, Allan inherited a fortune from an uncle. He did not name Poe as his heir. Allan rose; Poe kept falling. At seventeen, Poe went to the University of Virginia, where he drank and gambled and, in a matter of months, racked up debts totalling more than two thousand dollars. Allan refused to honor them, even though Poe was at risk of debtors' prison. Poe ran off. There followed a series of huffy pronouncements and stormy departures; most ended in Poe creeping back, begging Allan for money. "I am in the greatest necessity, not having tasted food since Yesterday morning," Poe wrote. "I have no where to sleep at night, but roam about the Streets." Allan was unmoved. Poe enlisted in the Army and served for two years as Edgar A. Perry. In 1829, Fanny Allan died. Andrew Jackson was inaugurated. Poe, while awaiting a commission to West Point, submitted the manuscript for a book of poems to a publisher, who told him that he would publish it only if Poe guaranteed him against the loss. Allan wouldn't front the money. Poe moved to Baltimore, where he lived with his invalid grandmother; his aunt, Maria Clemm; his nine-year-old cousin, Virginia; and his brother, Henry, an alcoholic who was dying of consumption.

Jackson, meanwhile, refused to renew the charter of the Bank of the United States, run by Nicholas Biddle. Biddle insisted on the need for federal regulation of paper currency. Some of Jackson's supporters wanted no paper money at all. Between 1830 and 1837, while Biddle and Jackson battled, three hundred and forty-seven state-chartered banks opened across the country. They printed their own money—$140 million in paper bills was in circulation by 1836. All this paper was backed by very little coin. At the end of

Jackson's two terms, American banks held six times as much paper money as gold.

Poe, who was broke, didn't need a bank. He could treasure up funds, he came to believe, in his own brain. He read as much as he could, borrowing books from Baltimore libraries. "There *are* minds which not only retain *all* receipts, but keep them at compound interest for ever," he wrote. Poe may have thought that his mind was a mint, but when his book of poems was finally published it earned him nothing (exactly what all his collections of poetry earned). He sold one of Maria Clemm's slaves. "I have tried to get the money for you from Mr. A a dozen times—but he always shuffles me off," Poe wrote to one of his creditors. And he added, lying, "Mr. A is not very often sober."

"I have an inveterate habit of speaking the truth," Poe once wrote. That, too, was a lie. (That Poe lied compulsively about his own life has proved the undoing of many a biographer.) In 1830, he finally made it to West Point, where he pulled pranks. "I cannot believe a word he writes," Allan wrote on the back of yet another letter from his wayward charge. Poe was court-martialled, and after that Allan, who had since married a woman twenty years his junior, cut him off entirely. Poe went to New York, but, unable to support himself by writing, he left the city within three months, returning to Baltimore to live with Mrs. Clemm and little Virginia. He published his first story, "Metzengerstein," about a doomed Hungarian baron, his gloomy castle, and his fiery steed. He won a prize of fifty dollars from the Baltimore *Saturday Visiter* for "MS Found in a Bottle." One of the editors, who met him, later wrote, "I found him in Baltimore in a state of starvation." In these straits, Poe wrote "Berenice," a story about a man who disinters his dead lover and yanks out all her teeth—"the white and glistening, and ghastly teeth of Berenice"—only to realize that she is still alive. It has been claimed, plausibly, that Poe wrote this story to make a very bad and long-winded joke about "bad taste." Also: he was hungry.

John Allan died in 1834, a rich man. He left his vast estate—three plantations and two hundred and thirty slaves—to his second wife and their three children. He left Edgar A. Poe not a penny. The following year, Poe was hired as the editor of a new monthly magazine, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in Richmond. He was paid sixty dollars a month, modest enough but, for him, a fortune. In 1836, Poe married Virginia Clemm. She was thirteen; he was twenty-seven; he said she was twenty-one. He called her his "darling little wifey." ("*I* was a child and *she* was a child, / In this kingdom by the sea; / But we loved with a love that was more than love— / I and my Annabel Lee.") Poe held the job at the *Messenger* for only sixteen months. He boasted that, under his editorship, the magazine's circulation grew from seven hundred to fifty-five hundred, but, as the Poe scholar Terence Whalen has discovered, this was another lie. The magazine had thirteen hundred subscribers when Poe started, and eighteen hundred when he left.

Poe lied about the *Messenger's* circulation because he was attempting to forge a career in the world of magazine publishing during very troubled economic times. And, plainly, he was a very troubled man. Quarrelling with the publisher of the *Messenger*, Poe left the magazine and, in February of 1837, moved to New York. *The New-Yorker*, a weekly magazine edited by Rufus Griswold, welcomed him, praising his work at the *Messenger*. Harper & Brothers was just about to publish his novel, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," the account of a Nantucket seafarer. His voyages involve whaling, mutiny, shipwreck, sharks, cannibalism, letters written in blood, cryptic "Ethiopian characters," and an island of treacherous black people, with black teeth, whose chief is named Too-wit.

Unfortunately, Poe arrived in New York just in time for the Panic of 1837. With all that paper money, speculators had gone wild; in the West, there had been a land grab and in the East a housing bubble—in New York, real-estate values had risen a hundred and fifty per cent. When the crash came, in the last weeks of Jackson's Presidency, bankruptcies swept the nation. In New York, riots erupted as the swelling ranks of the city's poor broke into food shops. "Down with the panic makers," one newspaper warned, promising, "A bright sun will soon dispel the remaining darkness." But the skies didn't brighten. In April, one New Yorker wrote in his diary, "Wall Street. The blackness of darkness still hangeth over it. Failure on failure." By the fall of 1837, nine out of ten Eastern factories had closed. Five hundred desperate New Yorkers turned up to answer an ad for twenty day laborers, to be paid at the truly measly wage of four dollars a month.

"Pym" failed, too. Poe's publisher had tried to pass the novel off as an authentic travel journal even as its author left a trail of clues to the hoax—"pym" being, for instance, an anagram of "imp." This didn't go over especially well. One reviewer called the book "an impudent attempt at humbugging the public." Poe did not write another novel. He moved to Philadelphia and wrote more short stories. During the seven-year depression that followed the Panic, Whalen has shown, Poe wrote a tenth as many poems and twice as many tales. He insisted that this was an aesthetic choice. Any piece of truly worthy writing must be able to be read at a sitting in order to achieve a single dramatic effect, the "Nevermore"-ish end with which, Poe said, every work of Art must begin. The tale, he believed, affords "the best prose opportunity for display of the highest talent." Maybe. But writing a book was exactly the kind of long-term investment Poe could not afford to make, especially with so little prospect of return. In the eighteen-twenties, books cost, on average, two dollars; during the depression, that price fell to fifty cents.

Poe had started writing gothic stories before the economy collapsed. But, as a man without independent means, he was especially vulnerable to market forces, and he knew it. (That's probably why he worked so hard at appearing so otherworldly, so Romantic.) He tried to deduce, from careful study, what sold best, and concluded, "The history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which have attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature—to Berenice*." Gothic stories—supernatural tales set, often, in medieval ruins—had been popular for decades. They were fun to write on a rainy day, as Mary Shelley had discovered, and even more fun to parody, as Jane Austen found out (both "Frankenstein" and "Northanger Abbey" were published in 1818, when Poe was in England). The genre had since gone to seed, but it still sold well. A philosophy of composition? No, what Poe developed was a philosophy of the literary marketplace. He had little choice. "The general market for literary wares is in a state of stagnation," he reported, during one of the worst years of the depression.

The problem with Poe comes to this: he needed to turn his pen to profit, but he also wanted to signal, as with "Pym," that he was lowering himself. *Look! See? I'm brilliant! Even at writing dreck!* In the story "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838), he tells of an aspiring writer of gothic tales who visits the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, seeking instruction. "Your writer of intensities must have very black ink, and a very big pen, with a very blunt nib," the editor advises, then offers some examples of recent successes:

> Let me see. There was 'The Dead Alive,' a capital thing!—the record of a gentleman's sensations when entombed before the breath was out of his body—full of taste, terror, sentiment, metaphysics, and erudition. You would have sworn that the writer had been born and brought up in a coffin. Then we had the 'Confessions of an Opium-eater'—fine, very fine!—glorious imagination—deep philosophy—acute speculation—plenty of fire and fury, and a good spicing of the decidedly unintelligible. That was a nice bit of flummery, and went down the throats of the people delightfully. They would have it that Coleridge wrote the paper—but not so. It was composed by my pet baboon, Juniper.

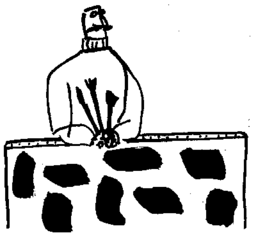
Poe calibrated and recalibrated. Just how many ways can a writer insult his readers and get away with it? If you take Poe's best horror stories at face value, they are wonderfully, flawlessly terrifying; they are also dripping with contempt. "Half-banter, half-satire" is how he once described them. "The Tell-Tale Heart" reads more like three-quarters burlesque, especially when you think about the literary output of Juniper the baboon. A madman with super-acuity murders an old man and entombs the corpse beneath the floor. When the police arrive, the madman begins to hear the beating of his victim's heart:

> I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*—
>
> "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Most of Poe's stories have this campy, floozy "Boo!" business at the end. Poe knew that these were cheap tricks. He played them well—nobody better—but they weren't to everyone's taste. The first editor to read "The Tell-Tale Heart" rejected it. It was, he said, too loud.

What Poe most wanted was never again to answer to an editor. "As soon as Fate allows, I will have a Magazine of my own—and will endeavor to kick up a dust," he wrote in 1839. Instead, he became, that same year, the assistant editor of the Philadelphia-based *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. He wrote, "That Magazines can live, and not only live but thrive, and not only thrive but afford to disburse money for original contributions, are facts which can only be solved, under the circumstances, by the really fanciful but still agreeable supposition, that there is somewhere still existing an ember not altogether quenched among the fires of good feeling for letters and literary men." But, as the depression deepened, magazines struggled, too. At *Burton's*, Poe had to send letters to his writers informing them, "The intense pressure has obliged Mr. B. with nearly every, if not with every, publisher in the country, to discontinue paying for contributions." Drinking and fighting with Burton are the usual reasons given for Poe's being sacked, in 1840. But, really, he was in an impossible position.

Poe then asked Nicholas Biddle to give him a thousand dollars to launch his own magazine, which he proposed calling *The Penn Magazine*. Biddle, broken by the Bank War, didn't oblige. Poe took a job as the book-review editor of *Graham's Magazine*. He wrote much of the copy himself. George Graham paid his writers on a scale that ranged from two dollars a page to twelve dollars. He paid Poe only four dollars, explaining, "The character of Poe's mind was of such an order, as not to be very widely in demand."

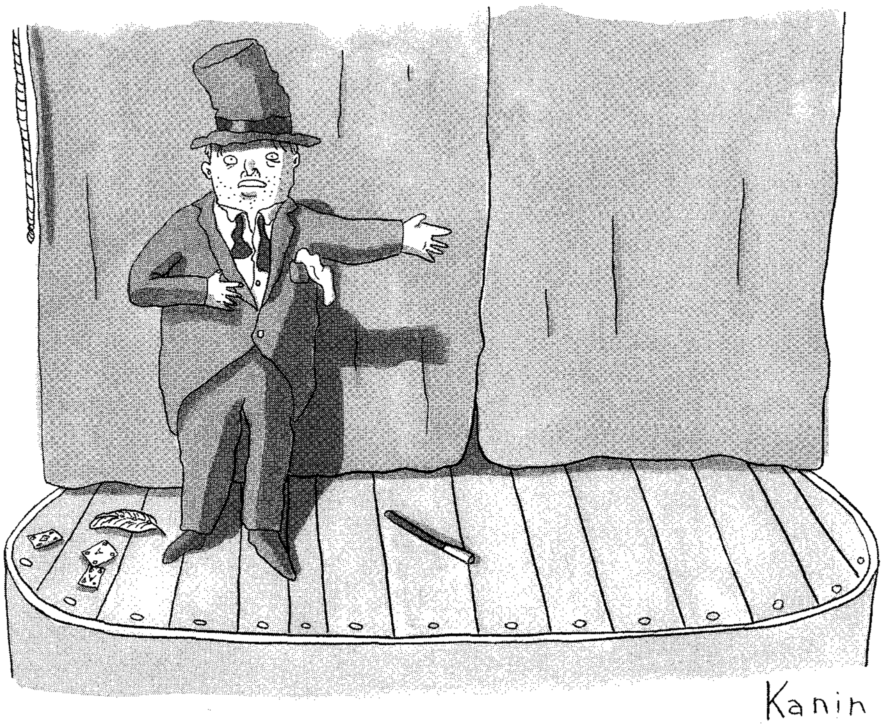


At *Graham's* and elsewhere, Poe wrote a prodigious amount of rather extraordinary literary criticism. He was a keen critic: relentless, unsparing, and, at times, abusive. Thus, Poe on Margaret Fuller: "The manner of Carlyle *is* conventional—with himself. The style of Emerson is conventional—with himself *and* Carlyle. The style of Miss Fuller is conventional—with herself and *Emerson* and Carlyle:—that is to say, it is a triple-distilled conventionality:—and by the word 'conventionality,' as here used, I mean very nearly what, as regards personal conduct, we style 'affectation.' " He was picky about diction. "The history of the borders is filled with legends," James Fenimore Cooper had written. " '*Abounds* with legends,' would be better," Poe suggested, "for it is clear that if the history were *filled* with legends it would be all legend and no history." Cooper was a popular writer, and this, to Poe, was a good sign that he was a bad one: "The most 'popular,' the most 'successful' writers among us (for a brief period, at least) are, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, persons of mere address, perseverance, effrontery—in a word, busy-bodies, toadies, quacks." (Poe aspired to be that one out of a hundred who was not.) He also found grossly offensive the prevailing fashion for a national literature, and waged a one-man campaign against the Young Americans, charging them with adhering to "the gross paradox of liking a stupid book the better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American." Poe also hated Transcendentalists and literary Bostonians, because, "self-bepuffed," they praised one another's work. He began his review of one much hyped novel, "For the sake of everything puffed, puffing and puffable, let us take a peep at its contents!" As Poe saw it, he was the nation's only real critic; everyone else was just a puffer. If Rufus Griswold's correspondence is any measure, Poe was right. A testy Griswold once wrote a publisher, "I puff your books, you know, without any regard to their quality."

Poe was, unsurprisingly, much attacked, as in a column titled "POE-LEMICAL." And still he fought. Literature was to Poe a religion, Graham once wrote, and Poe "its high-priest," who "with a whip of scorpions scourged the money-changers from the temple." Poe was looking, in other words, for a gold standard of literary value, against the nothingness of paper puffery. There was, in Andrew Jackson's America, a literary bubble, and Edgar A. Poe was determined to burst it.

Around the time Poe left Philadelphia, he changed the name of his proposed magazine to *The Stylus;* on its cover he wanted a picture of a hand holding a pen and, beneath it, a Latin epigraph that translates as "Sometimes a pen of gold and sometimes a pen of iron." *The Stylus* never got off the ground. Poe began to think of his life as a kind of forced labor in "the Magazine Prison-House." But the market that confined him to that prison affected other writers, and readers, too. Something had happened in the world, in the midst of the Panic. When Poe wrote to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Washington Irving, soliciting contributions, he began his letter, "I need not call your attention to the signs of the times." Magazines were cheaper than books and richer than newspapers. What Poe sensed was the commercial and stylistic ascendancy of magazine literature, despite the morbid financial times. The era of the magazine, with its clipped prose, relentless currency, and swift circulation, had arrived. No more "the verbose and ponderous." The "energetic, busy spirit of the age," Poe wrote, "tended wholly to the Magazine literature—to the curt, the terse, the well-timed, and the readily diffused."

Poe was, nevertheless, desperate for something other than magazine writing to fall back on, and in July of 1841 he urged the Tyler Administration to hire him as a cryptographer. "Nothing intelligible can be written which, with time, I cannot decipher," he boasted. That month, he published an essay on "secret writing," celebrating the ancient art of writing "in such manner as to elude general comprehension." Poe liked ciphers because he liked to send messages that readers lacking his particular genius could not decode. When he published a cryptogram that he had devised, he was astonished that even a single reader wrote in with the solution. "From among at least 100,000 readers," Poe replied to him, "you and I are the only persons who have succeeded."



*"And, as you can see, my beautiful assistant has disappeared . . . months ago . . . with my brother."*

• •

Poe had no real chance at a political appointment. But cryptography did save him, by leading him to an ingenious solution to his dilemma, that of a poet determined to both court and outwit the mob. In 1841, he published "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the story of a crime solved by a code-cracking French detective named C. Auguste Dupin. (The murderer turns out to be an orangutan.) Two more Dupin tales, the world's first detective stories, followed. With Dupin, Poe channelled his desire to write above his readers—to *dupe* them—into a character much like himself, a man who had once been wealthy but who, "by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it." Dupin has a very Poe-ish intelligence; he is "fond of enigmas, of conundrums, hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension praeternatural." And, like Poe, he gloats about his superior powers of perception, boasting, "with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms."

If Dupin sounds uncannily familiar, that's because Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, like every other author of detective fiction, not to mention the creators of a thousand TV crime shows, is incalculably in Poe's debt. "The children of Poe" is what Stephen King calls the members of his guild, and with good reason. But horror stories predate Poe, and have many other sources. Not so the literary sleuth. All detective stories and police procedurals begin with the intellectually imperious C. Auguste Dupin: methodical, eccentric, calculating—and insulting. We, mere readers, are so many Watsons, Hastingses, and Goodwins. Poe is the only Holmes.

Poe wrote his most popular story, "The Gold-Bug," just before the nation at last emerged from depression. In January of 1842, his wife had begun to cough up blood; she was eventually consumed, as Poe's mother had been, by tuberculosis. The squalid conditions in which the Poes lived didn't help. Poe begged Graham for an advance of two months' salary. In February, Poe wrote an unfavorable review of Dickens's "Barnaby Rudge," a novel about a village idiot and his talking raven that had been published, serially, in *The New-Yorker*. The next month, Poe met Dickens, who was on his American tour (during which Dickens coined the phrase "the almighty dollar"). By April, Poe had resigned his editorship of *Graham's Magazine*, claiming that he found the magazine "namby-pamby," but he had also taken to drinking again. (After Poe's death, Graham, who was fond of him, commended his bookkeeping: "He kept his accounts, small as they were, with the accuracy of a banker.") When Griswold replaced Poe as the editor of *Graham's*, a friend of Poe's printed a squib: "We would give more for Edgar A. Poe's toe nail, than we would for Rueful Grizzle's soul, unless we wanted a milk-strainer." Shortly afterward, Poe reviewed Griswold's "Poets and Poetry of America," remarking that Griswold had included in his anthology many poets whom Poe deemed to be beneath contempt. The battle between Griswold and Poe shaped Poe's legacy for a century.

"My only hope of relief is the 'Bankrupt Act,' " Poe wrote in June. He peddled "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," a sequel to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," at a discount, telling an editor that Graham would have paid him a hundred dollars: "Of course I could not afford to make you an absolute present of it—but if you are willing to take it, I will say $40." A friend who visited him that fall was mortified to find that Poe and his wife and Mrs. Clemm had a hard time coming up with anything to serve him. Then Poe offered to prostitute his magazine to the Tyler Administration. "It has been hinted to me that I will receive the most effectual patronage from Government, for a journal which will admit occasional papers in support of the Administration," he wrote. "Of the government patronage, upon the condition specified, *I am assured* and this alone will more than sustain the Magazine."

Early in 1843, Poe went to Washington, to lobby for that patronage, but he drank too much and abused his hosts. A journalist who met Poe on the streets of the capital found him seedy and woebegone. Just weeks later, Poe heard about a short-story contest, sponsored by the *Dollar Newspaper*. The prize was a hundred dollars: "*Very Liberal Offers and No Humbug*" read one version of the contest announcement. Poe had recently finished "The Gold-Bug," and had sold it to Graham for fifty-two dollars. Thinking to earn that extra forty-eight dollars, he returned Graham's money and submitted his story to the jury. He won first prize. The theme, another sign of the times, was clear enough: "The Banker's Daughter" took second prize; third went to a story called "Marrying for Money."

"The Gold-Bug" was printed in the *Dollar Newspaper* in June and July of 1843. Its Dupin-like protagonist, William Legrand, "had once been wealthy; but a series of misfortunes had reduced him to want." Legrand lives on Sullivan's Island, off South Carolina, with a Newfoundland and "an old negro, called Jupiter." Jupiter tells a spooky story: Legrand has discovered a strange beetle and, ever since, has been puzzling "a syphon wid de figgurs on de slate—de queerest figgurs I ebber did see. Ise gitting to be skeered." (Poe's racism ran very deep.) Jupiter is the gothic tale-teller inside "The Gold-Bug," not unlike Juniper, the gothic-tale-writing baboon of "How to Write a Blackwood Article." In both stories, Poe divested himself of what he considered to be the darker side of his own authorship.

"The Gold-Bug" is a tangle of puns, many of them, as the literary scholar Marc Shell has pointed out, having to do with currency. Legrand has found a bug the color of gold. "De bug is a goole bug," Jupiter says. In other words, a ghoul bug. It looks as if it were made of gold. It is not. "Dey aint *no* tin in him, Massa," Jupiter says. There's nothing in him—no tin, and no gold, either. Legrand has also found a parchment, made of goatskin, *kid*skin. It contains a map showing where a treasure was buried on the island by the pirate Captain Kidd. This pun Legrand himself has to figure out, in order to find the buried treasure. (Kidd's map, in this sense, is itself a guide to Poe's tales. Is Poe kidding or not? Are the tales a joke, and worthless, or brilliant, and priceless?) The parchment is covered with invisible ink, which, as Legrand discovers, conceals a cryptogram. After decoding the cipher, Legrand takes Jupiter, the dog, and the befuddled narrator on a hunt for the treasure, which turns out to be a chest containing jewels and gold coins.

Poe's intent in writing "The Gold-Bug," one reviewer noted, "was evidently to write a popular tale: money, and the finding of money being chosen as the most popular thesis." When a critic called the prize "A Decided Humbug" and suggested that no editor could possibly have paid Poe a hundred dollars for such "unmitigated trash," Poe sued for libel and won a retraction. Still, the story is a kind of hoax. It aspires to popularity by assaulting the very idea of a popular audience. Poe's tales, like paper money, promise value even as they flaunt their worthlessness. Like the beetle of its title, "The Gold-Bug," the story, is "no tin," too.

After "The Gold-Bug," Poe's life went from bad to worse. In late 1843, when his friends heard that his wife and his mother-in-law were starving, they gave him fifteen dollars, only to come across him, an hour later, drunk and in the street. In 1844, Poe was down to his last four and a half dollars. The publication of "The Raven" the following year didn't rescue him from poverty, but it did propel him, almost overnight, to literary celebrity. This he simply sabotaged. He became the editor and then the owner of *The Broadway Journal*, a New York weekly. But the tone of his criticism grew more rancorous, especially with the ill-advised publication, in *Godey's Lady's Book*, of a series of sketches called "The Literati of New York City: Some Honest Opinions at Random Respecting Their Authorial Merits, with Occasional Words of Personality." Invited to Boston to recite a new poem, he read, instead, a poem that he later said he had written as a child (and subsequently, in *The Broadway Journal,* confessed, without apology, that he had been drunk). He tried to keep the magazine afloat, writing to a friend, "So help me Heaven, I have sent and gone personally in all the nooks & corners of Broker-Land & such a thing as the money you speak of—is *not to be obtained.*" *The Broadway Journal* folded in 1846. Virginia Poe's prolonged illness left her husband in tatters. "I drank, God only knows how often or how much," Poe admitted. He had a breakdown. His wife died in January of 1847. Toward the end of his own life, Poe may have descended again into lunacy. "I was never *really* insane, except on occasions where my heart was touched," he insisted, just months before his death, when he was, at best, disordered to the point of necromaniacal incoherence: "I have been taken to prison once since I came here for getting drunk; but then I was not. It was about Virginia." The cause of his death remains mysterious.

Poe was buried in Baltimore in October, 1849. "Nothing further then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered." Days after Poe's death, Rufus Griswold wrote a breathtakingly belligerent obituary: Poe's passing "will startle many, *but few will be grieved by it.*" Maria Clemm, in a singularly unfortunate act of ignorance or avarice, gave Griswold power of attorney and sold him Poe's papers. Griswold became his literary executor. A year later, he wrote a biography of Poe in which he distorted the historical record, publishing slanders and forgeries, to make Poe seem a fiend.

Between Poe's lies and Griswold's forgeries, it can be difficult to take the measure of Edgar A. Poe. Was the man an utter genius or a complete fraud? It's a question that has riddled Poe scholarship for a century and a half. James Russell Lowell wrote, the year before Poe died, "There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge, / Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge." The question goes back to Poe himself, who was forever calculating. Half banter? Half satire? Two dollars a page, or four? Less Byron, more gore?

> And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
> On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
> And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
> And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
> And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
> Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Three-fifths Romantic; two-fifths poor. ♦

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**NEWYORKER.COM**

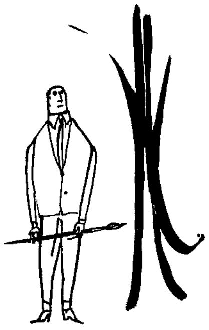
More on Poe on the Book Bench blog.

# BRIEFLY NOTED

*Poetry*

Sonata Mulattica, *by Rita Dove (Norton; $24.95).* Dove's verse sequence re-creates the life of the biracial violinist George Bridgetower, best remembered for being the first performer, and the initial dedicatee, of Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata. (Beethoven replaced his humorous dedication to the "lunatic and mulatto" after quarrelling with him, apparently over a woman.) A virtuosic treatment of a virtuoso's life, the poems use all registers—nursery rhymes, diary entries, drama—and are stuffed with historical and musical arcana. Yet the book remains highly accessible, reading much like a historical novel. Dove is fascinated by Bridgetower's life as a black musician and occasionally implies parallels with the world of jazz and rap, but the issue of race does not predominate. She is concerned equally with the status of musicians in a world of precarious patronage—even Haydn, at the Esterhazy estate, has "no more leave / to step outside the gates / than a prize egg-laying hen"—and with "the radiant web" of music itself.

It Is Daylight, *by Arda Collins (Yale; $16).* The poems in this bracing collection, which won the 2008 Yale Younger Poets prize, often suggest aftermath. Collins drops hints of a past narrative—"It's a shame / about adorable adults, / that they always seem like untrustworthy alcoholics"—but, within her stark tableaux, nothing is permitted to happen. The speaker, inevitably alone, is afraid of "seeing the refrigerator light go on," and requires hours of strategic planning to sit down to a bowl of soup. She longs for an external calamity (a house burning down, say) to make her feel "included and ordinary." This is the psyche as scorched earth: "Can I guess what I am thinking?" But Collins knows exactly what she's doing, lulling us with a litany of the mundane (vacuuming, turkey burgers, Celine Dion) and then blindsiding us with the sublime.



Inseminating the Elephant, *by Lucia Perillo (Copper Canyon; $22).* The opening pages of this exceptional volume, with an epigraph from Chekhov ("Any idiot can face a crisis; it is this day-to-day living that wears you out") and acknowledgment of the doctors who care for the author (she writes frankly about being wheelchair-bound, owing to multiple sclerosis), might suggest something sentimental. In fact, these poems are tough and witty; Perillo's time as a wildlife researcher gives her insight into the workings of a turtle's heart and blackbird behavior, while other topics range from Viagra and video games to Transcendentalism. "One of these days I'm going to get myself an avatar," she writes, "so I can ride an archaeopteryx in cyberspace— / goodbye, the meat cage." Perillo is also capable of tenderness, writing of her father's work overseeing bricklayers, or, in a poem about ex-lovers, her "absent children's nondepletion of the ozone layer."

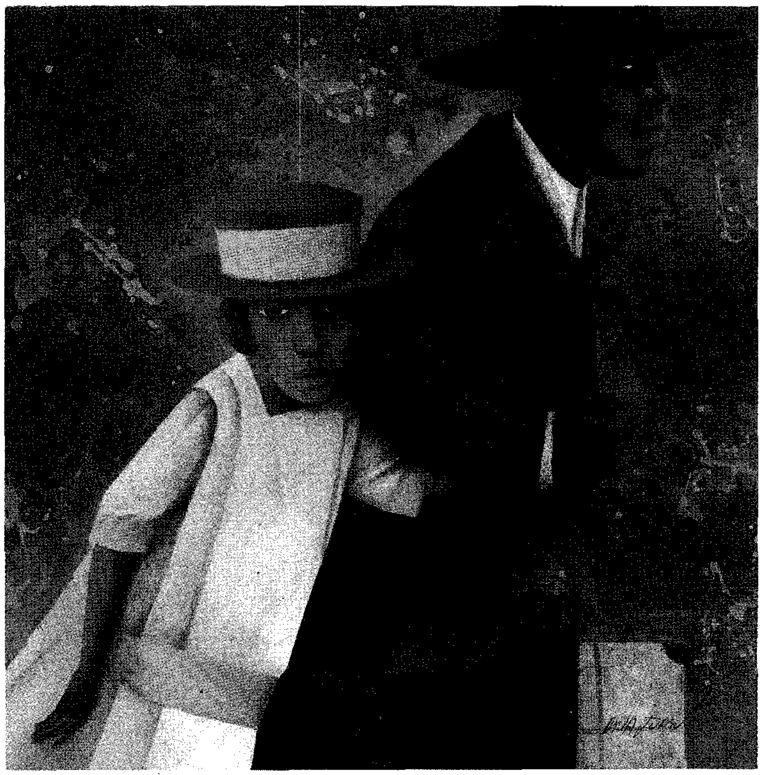
The Book of Props, *by Wayne Miller (Milkweed Editions; $16).* In his second collection, Miller quietly disassembles everyday life, identifying the rhetoric, folly, expectation, and artifice that make up the world. Light is an important feature—a light on a film set, a car's headlights, the "flash-veins of lightning"—as it helps the poet notice tiny actions and the monumental changes they inspire. An artist, for example, bites into her still-life's apple, choosing to "destroy the room's echo / of the canvas" and calling into question the accuracy of the space. Like his characters, Miller makes a vast impact using the smallest stroke—he is careful and suspenseful, wary of flamboyance. In a series of poems that emulate a screenplay, props like "disembodied / buttons, a collapsed preschool- / quality mobile, empty test tubes" pile up without obvious meaning. Readers in search of ready-made epiphanies are not welcome here.

THE THEATRE

# TRAPPED

*Two plays examine the prisons of self and state.*

BY JOHN LAHR



*Leigh and Coleman in August Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone."*

ANA JUAN

The late August Wilson thought of himself as a bluesman. His plays are chronicles of catastrophe, told lyrically; his theatrical mission was "to articulate the cultural response of black Americans to the world in which they found themselves," a world, he said, "that did not recognize their gods, their manners, their mores." Of the ten plays in Wilson's Century Cycle—which bear witness to the African-American experience in each decade of the twentieth century—"Joe Turner's Come and Gone" (revived, for the first time since its Broadway première, in 1988, at the Belasco, under the deft direction of Bartlett Sher) was his favorite and his masterpiece, the one in which the historical, the mythical, and the autobiographical reach their most ravishing equipoise. Wilson's brooding sense of dislocation and his decade-long struggle to discover his literary voice found a profound correlative in the floundering of the haunted, taciturn Herald Loomis (Chad L. Coleman), the hero of "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." By the time Loomis wanders into a Pittsburgh boarding house, in 1911, at the start of the play, he has endured twin traumas: he was dragooned into slavery for seven years by a white plantation owner, Joe Turner, and he was abandoned by his wife, for whom he has been searching, with his now eleven-year-old daughter, Zonia (Amari Rose Leigh), for four lost years. A long gray overcoat and a hat pulled down low on his head give Loomis a defensive carapace. He is unknowable, both to others and to himself. Loomis is not only unmoored ("I been wandering a long time in somebody else's world"); he is a dismantled man "who done forgot his song," as the resident boarding-house conjure man, Bynum Walker (the vivid Roger Robinson), tells him.

Loomis's challenge—the reclaiming of his moral personality—is foreshadowed by Michael Yeargan's set, which cleverly walks the same stylistic tightrope between the luminous and the mysterious as Wilson. Six legless brown chairs are silhouetted against the huge backdrop of a mackerel city sky. The surreal image of incompletion turns out to be a trompe-l'oeil—the chairs do have legs, though they're masked from view—but the idea remains: the issue for Loomis is how to make himself whole, how to prop himself up in the world. "My legs won't stand up! My legs won't stand up!" he cries, at the end of Act I, as he is blown backward along the floor by a howling wind, which also plays as the internal tempest released by a vision of his ancestors, "the bones people," who were lost at sea in slave ships during the Middle Passage to the New World.

In this iconic boarding house, Wilson condenses the experiences of a floating population of African-Americans, who find themselves ill-equipped to survive their emancipation. "Niggers coming up here from the backwoods . . . carrying Bibles and guitars, looking for freedom," the proprietor, Seth Holly (the compelling Ernie Hudson), says. "They got a rude awakening." At a time just after Plessy v. Ferguson—according to which African-Americans were considered "separate but equal"—the separation, for the boarding-house residents, is spectacular: separation from history, from family, from education, from capital, from self. The twice-jilted Mattie Campbell (the poignant Marsha Stephanie Blake), who "ain't never found no place for me to fit," seeks in each romantic alliance "a starting place in the world." Seth Holly can't seem to make his mark on life, either; he has a sharp entrepreneurial mind and a talent for manufacturing pots, but he can't get a loan to expand his business. Bynum Walker seeks not money but a mission in the alienated landscape. Bynum's name suggests the kind of spell he casts, which is about creating community and binding people. "People walking away and leaving one another," he says. "Just like glue I sticks people together." Rutherford Selig (Arliss Howard), a white peddler and "people finder," on the other hand, exploits the chronic cultural restlessness for profit. "It's not an easy job keeping up with you Nigras the way you move about so,” he says, taking a dollar from Loomis in exchange for the promise to keep an eye out for his wife.

Wilson wanted his dramatic world to be “fat with substance.” To that end, he elevated his African-American roots—what he called “the blood’s memory”—to “biblical status.” When the residents decide to “Juba down”—to perform, around the kitchen table, a thrilling call-and-response dance “reminiscent of the Ring Shouts of the African slaves”—Wilson brilliantly demonstrates how slaves adapted the remnants of African rituals to their new Christian ones. Loomis walks in on the near-frenzy and is enraged by the sight and sound of the others chanting “Holy Ghost.” “What’s so holy about the Holy Ghost?” he shouts, before breaking down and speaking in tongues himself. The moment puts him in atavistic touch with his own ghosts, his lost ancestors, though it is a knowledge that he is unable to make use of until the end of the play.

At the finale, Loomis finally comes face to face with his missing wife, Martha Pentecost (Danai Gurira), in a powerful scene that turns out to be a farewell, rather than a reunion. “Now that I see your face I can say my goodbye and make my own world,” Loomis tells her, handing over the bereft Zonia. The harrowing moment contains the woe of Wilson’s own life. (Wilson’s daughter Sakina Ansari, to whom “Joe Turner” is dedicated, was the price that he paid for the pursuit of his literary ambition; one day in 1973, he returned home to find that his first wife, Brenda Burton, who, according to his sister, thought that his writing was a waste of time, had left with their baby.) In the end, Loomis realizes that he has within him all that he needs in order to be reborn. “My legs stood up!” he says, just before he exits. “I’m standing now!” As he sets off, the air in this production is suddenly flecked with gold, a halo of sorts, meant to indicate Loomis’s resurrection. I like to think of it, however, as the shine of Wilson’s œuvre, “a wail and a whelp of joy” that was his hard-won and gorgeous song.

While the uneven casting of the minor roles in “Joe Turner” keeps a good production from being a great one, the excellent support of John Benjamin Hickey, Chandler Williams, and Nicholas Woodeson as backbiting Tudor courtiers in Friedrich Schiller’s 1800 play “Mary Stuart” (at the Broadhurst, in an outstanding new version by Peter Oswald) gives a special wallop to the evening’s main event: a showdown between the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots (the strapping Janet McTeer), imprisoned for plotting against the Protestant throne, and Queen Elizabeth I (the fine-boned Harriet Walter), who has her cousin’s butt in a sling but may want her head as well.

“Mary Stuart” is an exercise in eloquence and intrigue, in which both sides box clever, right up to the inevitable, thrilling finish. As the action plays out against Anthony Ward’s minimal black brick wall, with the courtiers dressed in contemporary suits and the royals in Elizabethan garb, the director, Phyllida Lloyd, imposes a dashing urgency on events. From the first beat, the play explodes before us—guards brush aside Mary’s protesting servant (the excellent Maria Tucci) and break open her footlocker with an axe. In the second act, as Mary enjoys a delicious moment of freedom in the rain on the grounds of the castle where she has been incarcerated, she is surprised by a visit from the Queen. With umbrellas open, the courtiers swoop across the stage like a flock of blackbirds; when they stop and turn, the Queen is suddenly revealed among them, facing her prisoner. It is an exquisite beginning to one of world theatre’s classic battles of wit and will.

To be heard, Mary must rein in her vindictiveness and her vanity; for her part, the Queen must weigh the bonds of family against the realities of power. McTeer and Walter are British actors of exemplary intelligence and sinew. They are alert and articulate; they parse every nuance of every word. As McTeer’s Mary struggles to contain her fury, Walter’s Queen hides a vicious heart behind her starchiness. In a rage at the Earl of Leicester’s apparent betrayal, Elizabeth declares, “He will be a monument to my severity.” In fact, as it turns out, Mary Stuart is that monument. By beheading her, Elizabeth solidifies her power and loses her soul. “Your rival is dead,” a courtier tells her in one of the play’s last lines. “Nothing to fear now. Or respect.” The political pragmatism may be predictable; the theatrical pyrotechnics with which it’s displayed are exceptional. ♦

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FROM
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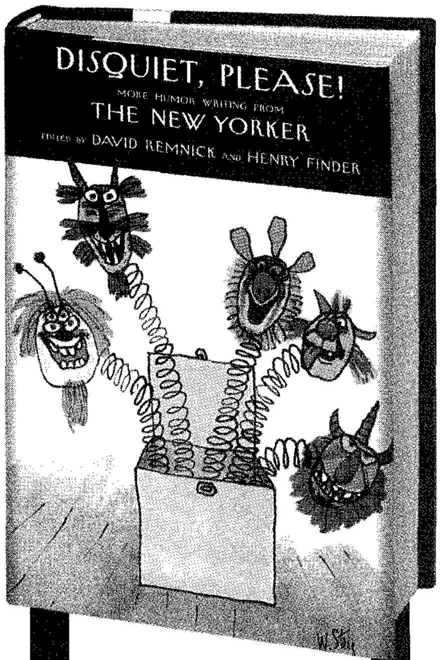
*If laughter is the best medicine,* Disquiet, Please! *is a wonder drug.*



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## THE CURRENT CINEMA

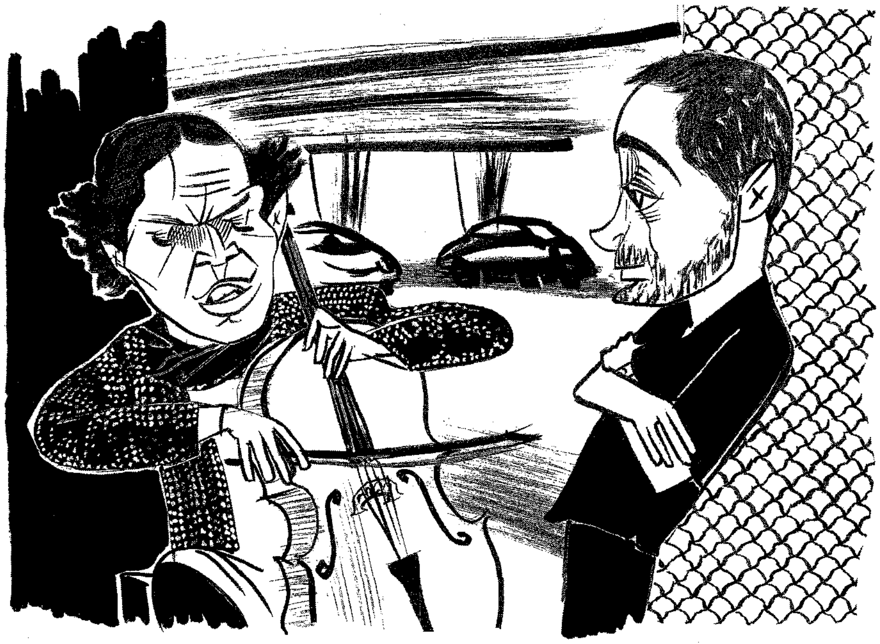
# EXTRA! EXTRA!

*"The Soloist" and "State of Play."*

### BY DAVID DENBY

Sometimes a mere coincidence in Hollywood's haphazard release schedule crystallizes a national moment—a gathering mood, a twinge of longing. Two ambitious new movies, "The Soloist" and "State of Play," both offer the stirring sight of a daily newspaper being reported, printed, and delivered—loaded into trucks and flung onto front lawns before dawn. And that's not all: in "State of Play," the deadline for an important investigative piece is repeatedly pushed back until the reporter can get the full story; in "The Soloist," a series of newspaper articles causes a mayor to change a city's social policies. Each movie features, at its center, the kind of scruffy urban hero whom Raymond Chandler canonized long ago ("Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean")—in this case, not a private eye but a print journalist, slovenly and sleepless, hounded by editors, comfortable only in a banged-up Saab. He may be disorganized and inadequate in his personal life, but his professional instincts are superb. He knows how the city works; there's no door he can't open. Are the two movies simply sentimental? No, they deal directly with the economic threat to news coverage. Both newspapers in question—the Los Angeles *Times*, in "The Soloist," and a Washington daily clearly modelled on the *Post*, in "State of Play"—are struggling to cut costs and stay in business, a difficult situation in which a talented reporter who takes his time is both a nuisance and a blessing. However else these movies succeed or fail, they tout the daily newspaper as guardian of a city's integrity and soul.

When I first heard about "The Soloist," I thought that the movie, though based on a true story, could only be an embarrassing exercise in high-mindedness. A star reporter, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), befriends a classically trained musician, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who suffers from schizophrenia and lives on the Los Angeles streets. Nathaniel is homeless but always at home—music is the only shelter he requires. Humanism awards will certainly pile up for the screenwriter, Susannah Grant ("Erin Brockovich"), and the director, Joe Wright ("Atonement"), yet the surprising thing about "The Soloist" is how candid and tough it is. Downey's reporter sees Foxx's musician sawing away on a two-stringed violin in a noisy public square: he is wearing a camouflage jacket covered by a yellow plastic vest; his belongings are stuffed into a nearby cart. Downey approaches with a mixture of professional curiosity and practiced caution. In return, Foxx doesn't look at him much—not then or any time. Turning away, his Nathaniel talks rapidly and lightly, rippling through incidents from his life and praising Beethoven, always Beethoven, complete with opus numbers. In this torrent of words, Nathaniel tries to hold on to the many possibilities in his mind before they elude him. He's not dangerous, but he's not sane. After writing about Nathaniel, Steve gets him an apartment and sets him up with some lessons on the cello, his favorite instrument, but Nathaniel, who has survived in tunnels and along freeways for years, doesn't easily give up old habits. He wants Steve in his life; he also wants him out of it. Foxx makes Nathaniel guarded and cagey, rooted in his madness, a little manipulative, and direct and intimate only when it suits him. The performance is fluent, even lyrical, and so quiet and delicate that an explosion of rage near the end comes as a genuine shock.



*Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey, Jr., in a movie directed by Joe Wright.*

TOM BACHTELL

"The Soloist" dramatizes a successful friendship, but it doesn't pretend that caring for a troubled person can straighten his disorderly mind, or that music can close wounds that have been open for years. As Steve looks into Nathaniel's life, the filmmakers cut back to the musician's childhood, spent in a basement apartment in Cleveland, obsessively playing the cello part of Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. The movie's culture worship will not torment music lovers—we're a long way here from brawny Cornel Wilde in a ruffled shirt stroking the keys as Chopin in "A Song to Remember." Dario Marianelli, who composed the score, added some heavyweight variations on Beethoven, but he and Joe Wright dig deep into the actual first movement of the "Eroica" as well, linking the lone boy at his instrument to the Juilliard student orchestra—in which Nathaniel played, though he later dropped out—and then to the Los Angeles Philharmonic rehearsing the symphony. We experience Nathaniel's obsession as a desire to join a great ensemble, which is why his affliction—the voices in his head that throw off his timing and his phrasing—has the detail and the anguish of a genuine tragedy.

Beethoven's music gives "The Soloist" momentum and grandeur, and Wright, trying to match it, uses the camera rhetorically but with greater eloquence and precision than he did in the show-offy "Atonement." The boy in the basement looks out a window and sees a burning car slowly rolling backward down the street. Is it a riot? The flames are a startling reminder of Nathaniel's distance from passions that are not his own. Wright soars over Los Angeles's tangled freeways like the angels who hover over Berlin in "Wings of Desire," and, at one point, trying to capture Nathaniel's contentment as he listens to a rehearsal, he sends the camera sweeping over the Philharmonic and past its music director, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and then right to Foxx's face. The charitable will overlook such follies as Wright's giving us a prolonged onscreen light show during Nathaniel's bliss-out. Wright makes mistakes, but, just when you think that the ethical and aesthetic presumptions of "The Soloist" are turning into vapor, the movie shrewdly comes back to earth. Steve forces Nathaniel to join Lamp Community, a shelter for homeless people with mental problems, and, outside the building, Wright assembles what seems like every lost and wrecked person in the city. He then does something odd and generous: he halts his moralized story of friendship and lets the people on the street tell their tales. The strange narratives make their own kind of music, and Downey, whose glittering dark eyes tell you that he's known crazies before, stays and listens. I don't know if Beethoven and a sympathetic newspaper reporter can redeem a messy American city, but this movie makes a plausible case for so fervent a dream.

"State of Play" is part dark-alley journalism story and part suspense thriller, with adultery, conspiracy, and the rivalry between print journalism and blogs tossed in. A crusading young congressman (a thinner Ben Affleck, with lips pressed together in resolute determination) is investigating a Blackwater-type private security company when his chief researcher, who is also his mistress, is pushed in front of an oncoming subway train. Was she murdered by the company, which is seeking billions of dollars in government contracts? The investigative reporter Cal McAffrey (Russell Crowe), a close friend of the congressman's, gets on the case and chases the main issue—private security's potential domestic role—while his acidulous editor (Helen Mirren), worried about her newspaper's survival, wants to pursue only the tabloid side of the story. "State of Play" is based on a six-hour BBC miniseries, and though I was gratified by the sharp dialogue and acting in many scenes, I don't think the movie adds up to much. The three screenwriters (Matthew Michael Carnahan, Tony Gilroy, and Billy Ray) may have been trying to work too many plot strands into two hours; in any case, "State of Play," which was directed by Kevin Macdonald, is both overstuffed and inconclusive. As is the fashion now, the filmmakers develop the narrative in tiny fragments. Something is hinted at—a relationship, a motive, an event in the past—then the movie rushes ahead and produces another fragment filled with hints, and then another. The filmmakers send dozens of clues into the air at once, but they feel no obligation to resolve what they tell us. Recent movies like "Syriana," "Quantum of Solace," and "Duplicity" are scripted and edited as overly intricate puzzles, and I've heard many people complain that the struggle to understand the plot becomes the principal experience of watching such films. In "State of Play," you're excited by all manner of journalistic derring-do—tense interviews, bluffs and put-ons that elicit information—but the final twists feel disconnected from what has been so laboriously and portentously set up. The potential danger posed by private security firms, for instance, is negligently dropped as an issue. The dénouement feels like another fragment, as if the movie were unwilling to end.

Yet "State of Play" can be readily enjoyed for its incidental pleasures. Jason Bateman is skittishly brilliant as a cynical public-relations guy who panics when he realizes that he has got in over his head; Rachel McAdams is a cocky blogger who has to learn how much work goes into actual reporting; Helen Mirren brings a wrathful British tartness to the goading of her staff. Russell Crowe's body is shapeless now, his complexion pasty, his hair long and lank; he looks like a dumpling in a wig. But there's enormous life in his eyes and his voice. Crowe has an animal quickness and sensitivity, a threatening way of penetrating what someone is up to, a feeling for weakness in friends as well as opponents. He seems every inch a great journalist; it's not his fault that the filmmakers let the big story slip through their fingers. ♦

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The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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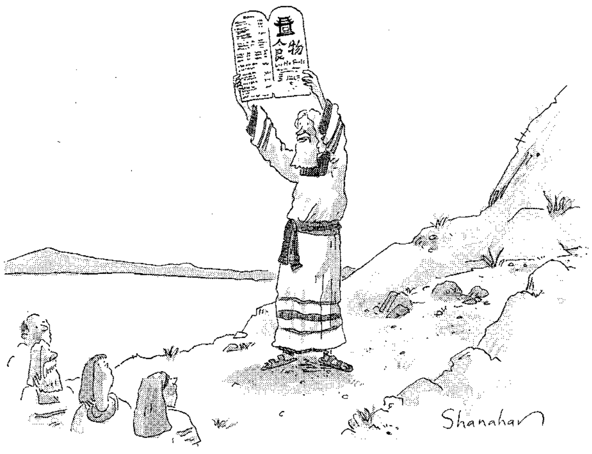
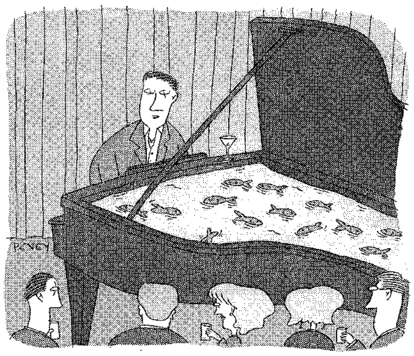
# CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Robert Leighton, must be received by Sunday, April 26th. Finalists in the April 13th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 11th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.*

## THE WINNING CAPTION



*"And Commandments Eleven to Twenty are the same as One to Ten, just with tofu instead of meat."*
Douglas Cosby, Austin, Texas



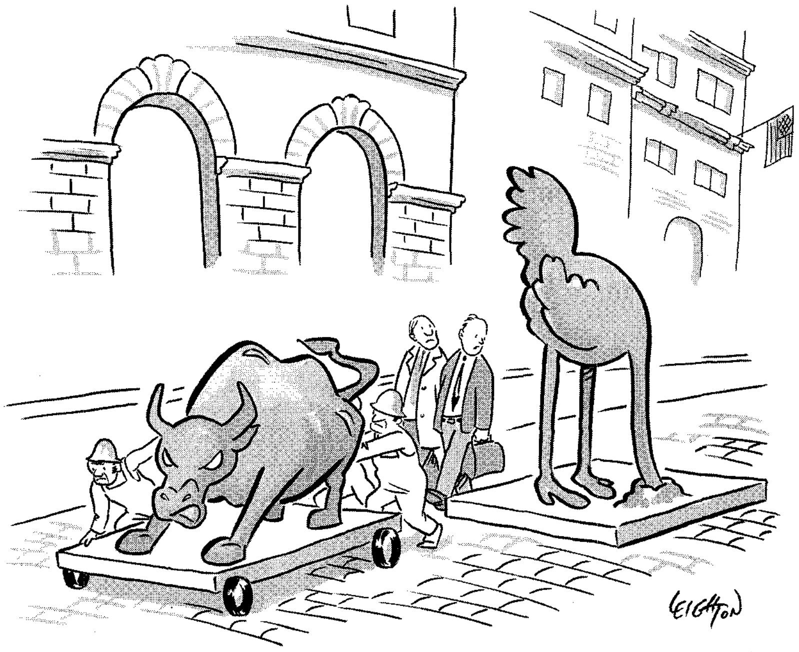
## THE FINALISTS

*"This song goes out to the one that got away."*
Elisa Narsu, Basking Ridge, N.J.

*"And every year they return to my piano to spawn and die."*
Frank Bruno, Sacramento, Calif.

*"Any requests before I tell you about tonight's specials?"*
Brian Shuman, New York City

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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Jott
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Remote
iXpenseIt
Jobs
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